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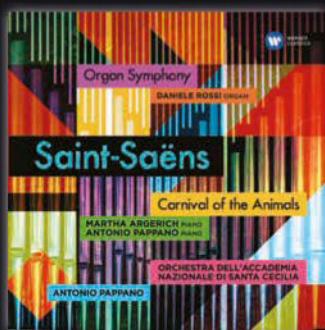
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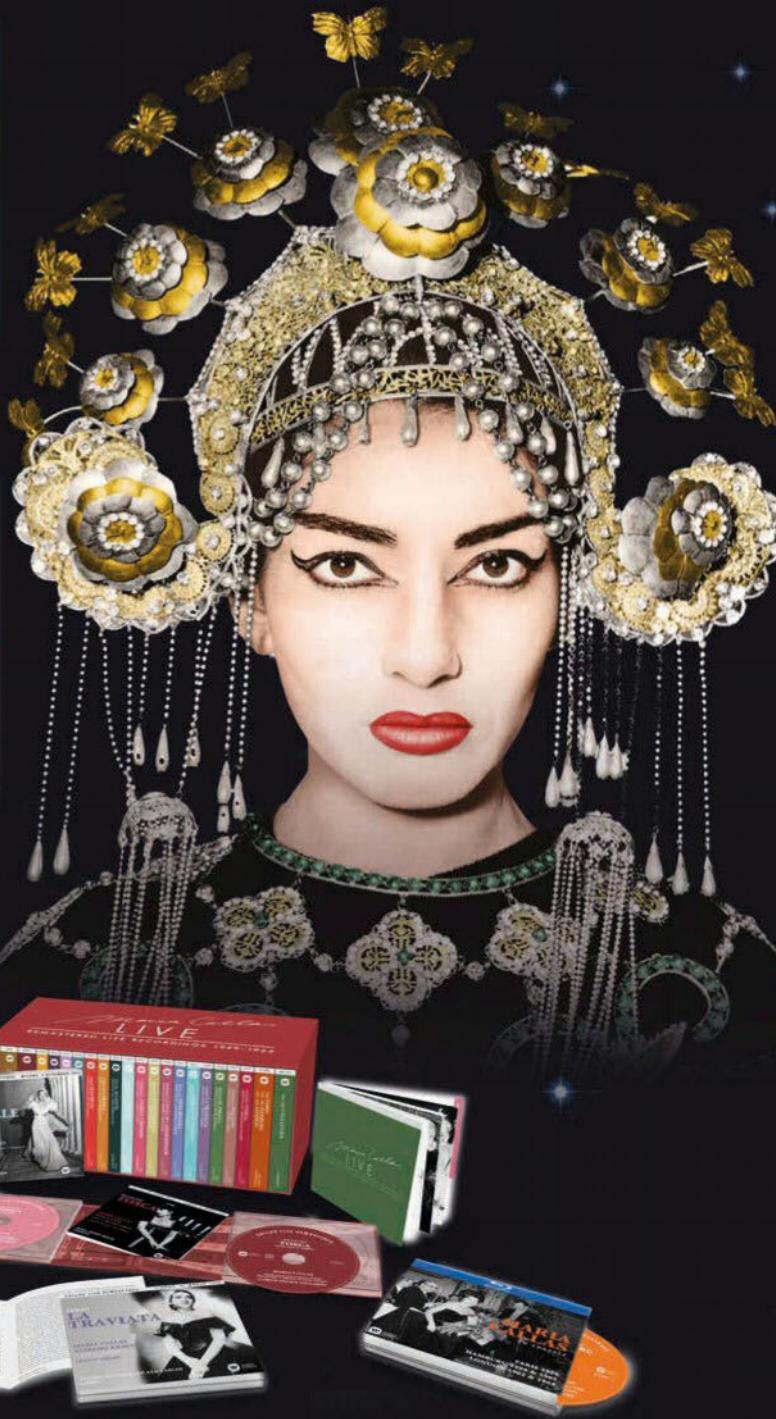
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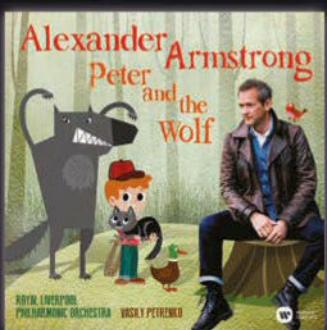
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LES TROYENS



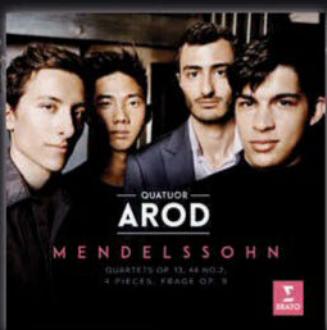
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GRAMOPHONE




SOUNDS OF AMERICA

A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

Chihara

'Vol 3 - Take the A Train'
 String Trio^a. Bagatelles^b. The Girl from Yerevan^c.
 Ellington Fantasy^d
^aJesse Mills, ^bMovses Pogossian ^cPaul Coletti,
^dMasumi Rostad ^eas ^fRaman Ramakrishnan vc
^bJerome Lowenthal pf ^cDavid Starobin gtr
^dLark Quartet
 Bridge  BRIDGE9488 (65' • DDD)

PAUL CHIHARA

TAKE THE A TRAIN



Paul Chihara (b1938) is well known as a film composer – starting with *Death Race 2000* for Roger Corman in 1975 – and teacher (the late James Horner was a pupil) but has a substantial catalogue of concert works to his credit, too, including symphonies, concertos and chamber music.

His String Trio (1985), the three movements of which play without pause, is a set of strongly integrated variations, developing from its unison A flat into a robust and compelling structure, with a reference to Beethoven's Op 131 towards the close. The example of Bartók's 14 Bagatelles lies behind the creation of Chihara's own set (2010), similarly created for didactic purposes but incorporating Japanese folk material (hence its subtitle, 'Twice Seven Haiku'). Although born in Seattle, Chihara is of Japanese ancestry. The 14 pieces cover a wide variety of moods and are played enchantingly by the dedicatee (and commissioner), Jerome Lowenthal.

The Girl from Yerevan (2014) – scored for the unusual combination of guitar, violin and viola – is also recorded here by two of its dedicatees, David Starobin and Movses Pogossian. Once again, folk music forms part of the musical material, this time Armenian (Yerevan being the modern state's capital) along with resonances of Khachaturian. *Ellington Fantasy* (1982) dates from Chihara's time as arranger for the Mercer Ellington Band. It comprises reworkings of four songs, of which only three are given here:

GRAMOPHONE talks to ...

Euclid Quartet

The Indiana-based quartet discuss their latest album of Dvořák and Wynton Marsalis

It's an interesting coupling. What made you put these works together?

We first paired the Dvořák with the Marsalis when we were awarded a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts for a programme celebrating the diverse ethnic influences on American string quartet-writing. Dvořák came to the US to assist American composers in finding their own school of composition, so he represented the grandfather of our project.

Is there anything specifically American in the music of Dvořák's famous quartet?

Without ignoring his Czech roots, Dvořák certainly incorporated unique American flavours in this work. The finale, for example, is driven by a rhythmic figure that seems to emulate a speeding locomotive.

Talking of locomotives, is there a connection here between the two works?

Yes, we think so. Trains were such a defining part of the development of America by



African American labourers that they inevitably made their mark on the early days of jazz. They play an important role in Marsalis's heavily jazz-influenced quartet, celebrating the vibrant history and culture of New Orleans. The movement 'Hellbound Highball' imitates lots of train sounds.

What other influences do you detect?

Marsalis masterfully intertwines jazz with styles such as gospel, hoedown and Latin dance from in and around New Orleans. His classical heritage shows with hints of Ravel and even Stravinsky in the flirtatious and elegant Ragtime finale. But what ultimately connects these pieces most strongly is their successful synthesis of disparate styles, which can also be said of the best aspects of American culture.

'I'm beginning to see the light', 'Sophisticated lady' (both composed in part or in whole by Duke Ellington) and the title-track, 'Take the A Train', written originally by Billy Strayhorn. A shame 'Mood Indigo' is omitted, but the Lark Quartet's subset makes for a lively conclusion to a thoroughly enjoyable disc. **Guy Rickards**

Chopin

Complete Nocturnes. Ballades – No 1, Op 23;

No 4, Op 52

Eliane Rodrigues pf

Navona  NV6123 (147' • DDD)



On the plus side, pianist Eliane Rodrigues possesses a colourful and focused sonority, abetted by the superb acoustic ambience of the Fazioli Concert Hall in Sacile, Italy, not to mention what appears to be a well-regulated Fazioli grand piano (model number F278, for those who care about such things). And she has a great left hand. But her rhythmically unfocused Chopin-playing wanders all over

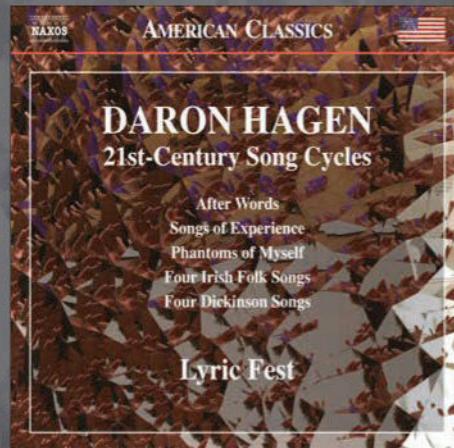
DARON HAGEN

21ST-CENTURY SONG CYCLES

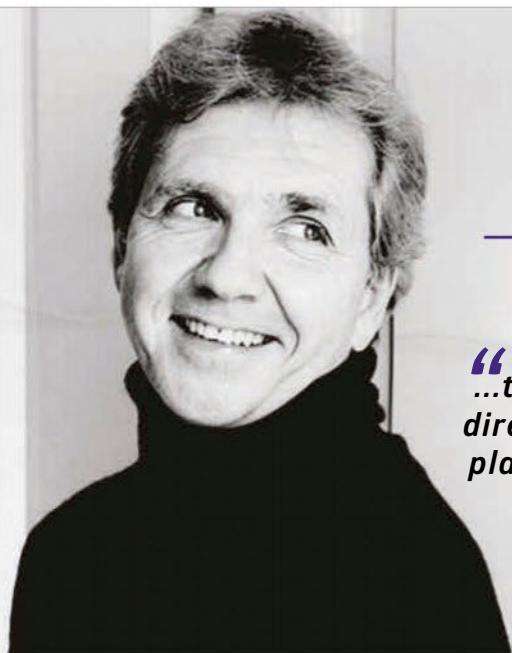
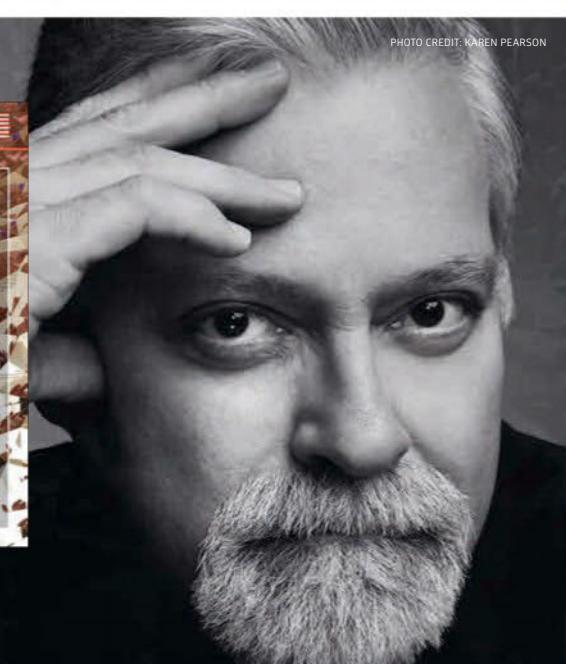
Justine Aronson; Kelly Ann Bixby;
Gilda Lyons; Suzanne Duplantis;
Joseph Gaines; Daniel Teadt;
Laura Ward

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- THE TIMES





A secure grasp of the composer's rhetoric: Craig Sheppard performs Chopin in Meany Theatre, Seattle, issued on Roméo Records

the place. Granted, a certain amount of freedom is essential in the Nocturnes, yet when it comes to meting out rubato, Rodrigues rarely gets the dosages and proportions right.

Her fussing over the basic pulse of the opening section of Op 27 No 1 undermines its dark, undulating character, with tempo adjustments at the major-key climax that totally ignore Chopin's intended dramatic build. The pianist's overly languid Op 27 No 2 renders this gorgeous nocturne dead on arrival. Op 32 No 2's waltzing middle section droops rather than soars, while Op 37 No 2 takes too much time settling into a (sort of) basic tempo. At first Rodrigues steers Op 48 No 1 on a steady course, yet the tumultuous octaves tinkle when they ought to explode.

I'm intrigued by the pianist's brisk tempo and *détaché* left-hand accompaniment at the outset of Op 55 No 1 but Op 55 No 2's stop-and-go phrasing bends Chopin's elaborate contrapuntal edifice out of shape. To be fair, Rodrigues captures the strangeness of Op 15 No 3's conclusion by way of subtle pedal effects and harmonic underpinnings. While the G minor and F minor Ballades abound in ear-catching voicings and local details, there's little of the dynamic scaling, dramatic impetus and structural unity distinguishing similarly 'free-spirited' Ballades from Krystian Zimerman and Ivan Moravec.

There's no doubting Rodrigues's sensitive core and her genuine affection for the Nocturnes but her interpretations ultimately lack what the composer/critic Virgil Thomson called 'the discipline of spontaneity'. **Jed Distler**

Chopin

'The Essence of an Iron Will'

Piano Sonatas - No 2, Op 35; No 3, Op 58.

Fantaisie, Op 49. Three Mazurkas, Op 59

Craig Sheppard *pf*

Roméo ® 7322 (73' • DDD)

Recorded live at Meany Theatre, Seattle, February 2017



Craig Sheppard, the Philadelphia-born pianist who turns 70 this year, has built a remarkable career by almost any standard. He studied with Eleanor Sokoloff at Curtis and at the Juilliard School with Sasha Gorodnitzki. Later, during two decades' residence in London, he worked with Kabos, Feuchtwanger and Curzon. His discography is not insubstantial, ranging from Shostakovich and Debussy, all the Beethoven sonatas and the *Diabellis* to Schubert, Schumann, Liszt and great stretches of Bach. Since 1993 he has made Seattle his centre of operations. He subtitled his new Chopin disc for Roméo

'The Essence of an Iron Will'. It draws on two live performances at Meany Theatre in Seattle recorded this past February.

Sheppard's Chopin is straightforward and unaffected, making its points with a secure grasp of the composer's rhetoric. A robustly rhythmical F minor Fantasy has sweep and a certain jauntiness, though something of the same rhythmic precision when applied to the trio of the Funeral March in Op 35 comes off as monotonous. Sheppard's fleet fingers point up interesting harmonic implications in both the *Presto* finale of Op 35 and the Scherzo of Op 58. In the Mazurkas, Op 59, it sounds as though genuine magic is occurring, particularly in terms of rubato and voice-leading.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to be little more than vague in describing this recital. Whether due to the peculiar acoustical characteristics of the hall, to microphone placement or to sound enhancement in the editing process, the sound on this recording leaves a great deal to be desired. The piano sounds bloated, when not waterlogged, clangorous in the treble and boomy in the bass, making it virtually impossible to discern the quality and shading of Sheppard's sound, and occasionally even distorting attack and release. And what a shame it is, since there seems to be a great deal of compelling interest here, though much of it is lost trying to 'listen around' this unnatural sound reproduction.

Patrick Rucker



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Dvořák · W Marsalis

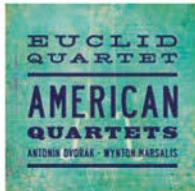
'American Quartets'

Dvořák String Quartet No 12, 'American', Op 96

B179 W Marsalis String Quartet No 1, 'At the Octoroon Balls'

Euclid Quartet

Afinat (F) AR1701 (72' · DDD)



What an interesting pairing of works the Euclid Quartet have come up

with for their new disc. 'American Quartets' teams Dvořák's String Quartet No 12 in F, known as the *American*, with Wynton Marsalis's String Quartet No 1, *At the Octoroon Balls*.

There is little hard evidence of anything specifically American within Dvořák's quartet but its spirit appears to have been influenced by the composer's residency in the United States (1892-95). The music overflows with folk-like material – perhaps more Czech than Yankee – and the prevailing atmospheres are suffused with the warmth, pride and vitality this composer wore so generously on his sleeve. The Euclid Quartet play the piece with bounties of fervour and poetry, while always heightening the score's meticulous craftsmanship.

Marsalis continues to be a musician of wondrous resourcefulness. Along with his superior abilities as a jazz trumpeter, he has broadened his artistic purview in a series of ambitious compositions. His First String Quartet evokes American Creole traditions in his native New Orleans through seven movements of varied and inventive incident. The opening movement, 'Come Along Fiddler', is an expansive tour de force for solo violin. The subsequent buoyant and lyrical movements explore a range of cultural references, with blues, ragtime and jazz giving the string quartet a kaleidoscopic workout.

The Euclid musicians make a veritable feast of the score. Jameson Cooper exults in the first movement's beguiling flights, and he and his colleagues are at turns tender, whimsical and stirring in Marsalis's other smashing bursts of imagination.

Donald Rosenberg

Makan

Letting Time Circle Through Us

Either/Or

New World (F) 80791-2 (47' · DDD)



Keeril Makan's *Letting Time Circle Through Us* (2013) is a sextet in one

large, euphonious, unbroken span. Written for the Either/Or ensemble with whom Makan (b1972) has worked over many years, their understanding of his music is manifest throughout what sounds like a definitive interpretation. The core of the ensemble is a piano trio, through which the varied sonorities of a cimbalom, guitar and assorted, mostly chiming, percussion are threaded. At points, the cimbalom, guitar (at various times played with fingers, a pick and a bow) and piano concoct a sound like a 3D honky-tonk piano, and I wonder whether the work would render equally well on two pianos (or one, four-handed), violin and cello.

The opening fades in artificially – one really cannot hear the violin's initial down-bow – and slowly the other instruments are introduced. The structure is essentially an expanded, varied rondo (the booklet cites ABACADA) with elements of a passacaglia built from two core ideas: the initial static drone and its developments, often anchored on the opening A, repeated like a ground bass throughout the work representing stability; and what Makan describes as 'singular novel musical events ... which contrast with the initial stability'. The work's pulse is low, not unlike waves gently lapping a seashore seemingly repetitively. Each wave is different, of course, and there are pauses and accelerations throughout; so it is, too, with *Letting Time Circle Through Us*. It feels at times like Reichian minimalism slowed down like some mesmeric New Age backing track, yet there is more going on here and the more one listens to the whole, the more one hears. Very good sound from New World. **Guy Rickards**

Trotta

For a Breath of Ecstasy^a. Behold how good^b.

In manus tuas^b. Totus tuus^b

^aLeah Forsyth ob ^aAndrej Kurti, ^aJonathan Andino

vns ^aSofia Thelashvili va ^aAlonso Restrepo

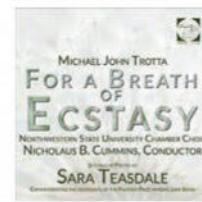
Cardozo vc Northwestern State University

Chamber Choir / ^aMichael John Trotta,

^bNicholaus B Cummins

Hampton Road (F) HRCD1119 (43' · DDD · T)

Recorded live at Northwestern State University, March 3, 2017



The American composer Michael John Trotta has concentrated on choral

music for most of his career. The newest disc devoted to his works offers both secular and sacred fare. Its title, 'For a Breath of Ecstasy,' is a line from one of the seven Sara Teasdale poems Trotta has set for choir, oboe and string quartet. The poems come from an extensive Teasdale collection, *Love Songs*, that won her the first Pulitzer Prize in Poetry in 1918.

The poems in Trotta's cycle, commissioned to mark the Teasdale-Pulitzer centennial, are reflections by a woman grateful for the affection she has received. The lyrical verses prompted the composer to summon equally lyrical musical responses, with appealing melodic lines, tender harmonies and a palette of glowing vocal and instrumental colors.

Trotta binds the cycle together with a beguiling theme, first played by the oboe, that leads to all manner of lovely choral lines. The 'ecstasy' soars in the fifth song, 'Spend all you have on loveliness', a poignant and apt thought, especially for a poet who was called 'first, last and always a singer' in an early review of *Love Songs*. The disc is rounded out by three sacred pieces for unaccompanied choir that show Trotta in his rapturous element, whether the texts are English or Latin.

The Northwestern State University Chamber Choir, from Louisiana, perform all of the works with fine sense of ensemble and words under the direction of Nicholaus B Cummins. **Donald Rosenberg**

Vines

Loose, Wet, Perforated

Aliana de la Guardia sop **Loose**

Brian Church bar **Wet**

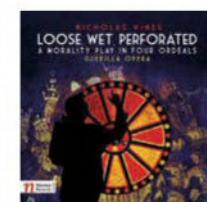
Doug Dodson counterten **Perforated**

Thea Lobo mez **Various roles**

Amy Advocat cl **Philip A Stäudlin** saxs

Chris Moore tbn **Mike Williams** perc

Navona (F) NV6124 (67' · DDD)



Commissioned by the Boston-based experimental opera company Guerilla Opera and premiered in 2011, Nicholas Vines's highly resourceful pocket opera (four singers and four instrumentalists) may only find total satisfaction on stage.



Velvet beauty: Brian Church as Wet in Nicholas Vines's pocket opera *Loose, Wet, Perforated*

This studio recording is dazzling nonetheless, suggesting an everybody's opera destined for the street, where it could theoretically take place and where the sex appeal of its heady musical eclecticism lies.

With only two exquisite instrumental interludes to interrupt the 67 minutes of intense dialogue, Vines wields a wonderful toolkit of insinuating words and rhymes – 'Is laughtering ... Drissy drismess oose ... Lurkinooly nal freeds ...', answered by 'Ugh, oh dear ... shame she creamed so poorly' – and punctuates them with quick, deft touches including lyrical woodwind riffs and Wagnerian brass.

Brian Church's Wet commands the drama with his baritone of velvet beauty and pure intonation. Aliana de la Guardia's Loose lets loose dizzying flights of virtuosity, highlighted by screaming riffs so painful that you want them to simultaneously stop and never go away. Thea Lobo's very lovely mezzo accommodates a variety of roles with surpassing ease. Doug Dodson inhabits the alien mind of Perforated so effectively that you wonder what he would have done with one of the other roles – oh, didn't I tell you? *Loose, Wet, Perforated* is a story that ends with the characters rotating roles and beginning all over again.

No less amazing is the band, led by Amy Advocat on clarinets and Chris Moore on trombone. Recorded at the beginning of last October, it's all clear and incisive but slightly dry. The booklet notes and indispensable libretto are available online. **Laurence Vittes**

'Sonatas & Nocturnes'

Coenen Sonata Lachner Notturno, Op 83

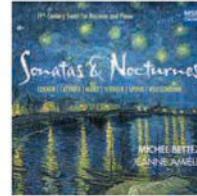
JM Marx Sonata Schreck Sonata, Op 9

Spohr Adagio, WoO35 Weissenborn

Notturno, Op 9 No 4

Michel Bettez bn Jeanne Amièle pf

MSR Classics © MS1648 (67' • DDD)



Michel Bettez has been principal bassoon for more than 30 years of Montreal's beloved Orchestre Métropolitain, currently under the artistic direction of that famous Montrealer Yannick Nézet-Séguin. With pianist Jeanne Amièle a stunning partner, and audiophile sound, Bettez and his Bernd Moosmann 222A show what sensuous tone and seamless virtuosity can do in a charmingly obscure collection of 19th-century treasures the bassoon was surely invented for.

Some of it is of extremely high quality. Less than five minutes long, Ignaz Lachner's *Notturno* has that haunting Schubertian quality common to the Lachner clan. Josef Mattern Marx's 21-minute *Sonata* sports a variety of attractive moods; the opening of the first-movement *Allegro* is as elegant as anything in Beethoven's Op 5 cello sonatas. And while Johannes Meinardus Coenen may be a name known only to bassoonists, Bettez may change that. The first movement opens like Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto, the second takes the audacious form of a recitative and the third is a stormy, extravagant *Allegro*. But Julius Weissenborn's *Notturno*, though the composer was principal bassoonist at the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra for 30 years, is more mundane than nocturnal. And Gustav Schreck's *Sonata*, though this is at least its third recording, is more of the same.

Bettez and Amièle give what must be ideal performances. He plays beautifully in tune and with a wistful Gallic sweetness, she with full-blooded richness and poetry. Recorded in the concert hall at the Conservatoire de Musique de Montréal with indecently sumptuous sound, this recital is what music-making in Montreal is all about.

Laurence Vittes

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A celebration of the art of singing

Celebrating the voice!' Those are the words emblazoned on our cover this month, and throughout the magazine we've done exactly that: explored and celebrated singing, in all its extraordinary diversity.

Let's begin with Erato's set of Berlioz's *Les Troyens*, our Recording of the Month and the subject of a fascinating feature by Editor-in-Chief James Jolly. It draws on some of today's finest singers, and the interpretative insight of a conductor, John Nelson, for whom exploring Berlioz has been a career-long quest. It also intriguingly – and fairly uniquely – bridges that oft-discussed divide between studio and live recording, drawing on the best of both. Though taken from concert performances, it was conceived first and foremost as recording sessions in front of an audience. It's an approach other labels might consider when juggling such matters as interpretative excellence, the frisson of live performance, and budgets. Either way, as a celebration of both the voice and the art of recording, it's a formidable achievement.

Then we're perhaps on more familiar ground for our Christmas issue – choral music. The Reformation's impact on religion was seismic. Its long-term part in shaping the development of music was also profound, and the nature of what so many of us sing today can still find its roots in those events of half a century ago. Then from marking five centuries to five decades, and the King's Singers. Their distinctive sound – from polyphony to pop – has remained as impeccably excellent as ever through the many line-up changes, as has their commitment to



reaching audiences throughout the world in a manner which is open and engaging. It's hard to think of many groups that better embody the desire to celebrate singing; a whole-hearted Happy Birthday to them from all at *Gramophone*. Finally, still in the choral world, our festive season brings our annual round-up of releases from the choirs, cathedrals and colleges who tap into the powerful resonance Christmas has for composers, congregations and audiences alike.

All the above features were planned. What emerged with delightful serendipity was that, when considering this month's Editor's Choice list, there was an extraordinary strength among vocal releases. Settling on the Editor's Choices usually involves balancing a desire for variety of repertoire with offering a true representation of which releases simply stand out. And after discussion this month, it felt only right – and, as it turned out, highly appropriate – to lean towards the latter consideration. Thus, of the 12 Editor's Choices (including Reissue and DVD of the month), 10 involve singing. But what rich achievements – and what breadth of repertoire! Majestic medievalism from the Sollazzo Ensemble, or *fin de siècle* French songs from Sabine Deviehle and Marianne Crebassa don't perhaps have a lot in common. Except, of course, for the obvious link. The voice. Diversity then, but a single compelling constant: the remarkably direct communication between an artist and an audience, achieved through that most fundamental and basic aspect of music-making, singing. Happy listening – and a very happy Christmas to you all.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* was one of my earliest loves, and a constant Christmas delight,' says

MARK PULLINGER, author of this month's Collection. 'Exploring some two-dozen available versions on disc on the occasion of its 125th anniversary took me right back to my earliest days of collecting.'



'It has been fascinating to reflect on the Reformation's impact on the music of its time and to be reminded of Luther's own love of music,' says **FABRICE FITCH**, writer of our Reformation feature. 'How differently might Western art music have turned out without him?'



'Interviewing the six King's Singers simultaneously was great fun,' says **JEREMY NICHOLAS**, who writes this month's 50th-anniversary feature on the much-loved ensemble, 'but I also came away with renewed admiration for their astonishing musical skills and versatility.'

THE REVIEWERS Andrew Achenbach • David Allen • Nalen Anthoni • Tim Ashley • Mike Ashman
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Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Adrian Edwards • Richard Fairman • David Fallows
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Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is the magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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Phone 020 7738 5454 **Fax** 020 7733 2325
email gramophone@markallengroup.com
EDITOR AND PUBLISHER Martin Cullingford
DEPUTY EDITOR Sarah Kirkup / 020 7501 6365
REVIEWS EDITOR Tim Parry / 020 7501 6367
ONLINE CONTENT EDITOR James McCarthy / 020 7501 6366

SUB-EDITOR David Thresher / 020 7501 6370
SUB-EDITOR Marja Đurić Spear

ART DIRECTOR Dinah Lone / 020 7501 6689
PICTURE EDITOR Sunita Sharma-Gibson / 020 7501 6369

AUDIO EDITOR Andrew Everard

EDITORIAL ADMINISTRATOR Libby McPhee
THANKS TO Hannah Nepil and Charlotte Gardner

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF James Jolly

ADVERTISING

Phone 020 7738 5454 **Fax** 020 7733 2325
email gramophone.ads@markallengroup.com

COMMERCIAL MANAGER

Esther Zuke / 020 7501 6368

SALES EXECUTIVE

Simon Davies / 020 7501 6373

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND BACK ISSUES

0800 137201 (UK) +44 (0)1722 716997 (overseas)

subscriptions@markallengroup.com

PUBLISHING

Phone 020 7738 5454

HEAD OF MARKETING AND DIGITAL

STRATEGY Luca Da Re / 020 7501 6362

MARKETING MANAGER Edward Craggs / 020 7501 6384

DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

DEVELOPMENT Matthew Cianfrani

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR Richard Hamshere / 01722 716997

PRODUCTION MANAGER Jon Redmayne

CIRCULATION DIRECTOR Sally Boettcher / 01722 716997

SUBSCRIPTIONS MANAGER Chris Hoskins / 01722 716997

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR Martin Cullingford

PUBLISHING DIRECTOR Paul Geoghegan

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER Ben Allen

CHAIRMAN Mark Allen



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The musical interests of Edmund de Waal

GREAT GIFT IDEAS

**THREE TRAGEDIES**

SHAKESPEARE

Royal Shakespeare Company

Rising star Paapa Essiedu gives a stunning performance in Simon Godwin's *Hamlet*; Antony Sher leads the way as the proud but fatally flawed monarch in Gregory Doran's acclaimed *King Lear*; Iqbal Khan's astonishing and groundbreaking production of *Othello*, featuring Hugh Quarshie in the title role.

DVD SET | BLU-RAY SET**NORMA**

BELLINI

Royal Opera House

Star soprano Sonya Yoncheva sings the towering role of Bellini's *Norma* – a priestess torn between love and duty – in a timeless tale of love and betrayal. The spectacular production by Àlex Ollé stars a superb cast including Joseph Calleja and Brindley Sherratt, conducted by Antonio Pappano.

DVD | BLU-RAY**ANASTASIA**

TCHAIKOVSKY

Royal Opera House

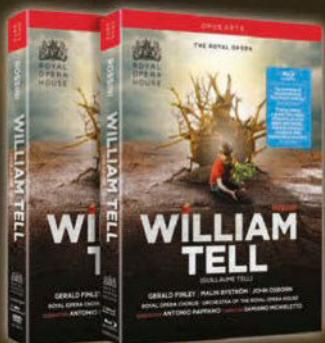
Royal Ballet Principal Natalia Osipova dances the title role in Kenneth MacMillan's haunting ballet, to atmospheric music by Tchaikovsky and Martinů. *Anastasia* tells the story of Anna Anderson who, following the Russian Revolution and the murder of the royal family, claimed she was the surviving Grand Duchess Anastasia.

DVD | BLU-RAY**THE TEMPEST**

SHAKESPEARE

Royal Shakespeare Company

On a distant island, a man waits. Robbed of his position, power and wealth, his enemies have left him in isolation. But this is no ordinary man or ordinary island. Simon Russell Beale returns to the RSC after 20 years to play Prospero. Directed by Artistic Director Gregory Doran.

DVD | BLU-RAY**WILLIAM TELL**
ROSSINI

Royal Opera House

Antonio Pappano, Music Director of The Royal Opera, conducts Rossini's epic final masterpiece of French grand opera *William Tell*. Featuring an all-star cast that includes Gerald Finley in the title role, alongside John Osborn, Malin Byström and Sofia Fomina.

DVD | BLU-RAY**ROYAL OPERA COLLECTION**

Royal Opera House

Spanning more than two hundred years of opera, this magnificent 22-disc collection brings together 18 outstanding operas. The Collection is a dazzling tour of operatic treasures by Mozart, Verdi, Bizet, Wagner, Mascagni, Leoncavallo, Puccini, Strauss, Szymanowski, Britten and George Benjamin.

DVD SET | BLU-RAY SET**BÉATRICE ET BÉNÉDICT**
BERLIOZ

Glyndebourne

Through the eye of French director Laurent Pelly this expression of Berlioz's undying admiration for the Bard – his adaptation of *Much Ado about Nothing* as an opéra comique – becomes 'an elegant treatise on love and music designed in shades of grey with 50s-era costumes' (Sunday Express ★★★★).

DVD | BLU-RAY**PUCCINI BOX SET**
LA BOHÈME · TOSCA
MADAMA BUTTERFLY

In lavish productions from Madrid's Teatro Real, Jesús López Cobos directs an outstanding cast in *La bohème*. Daniela Dessi plays the fiery singer *Tosca* in Nuria Espert's staging of lust, betrayal and revenge, while Cheryl Barker and Martin Thompson are at the helm of an inspired cast in *Madama Butterfly*.

DVD SET

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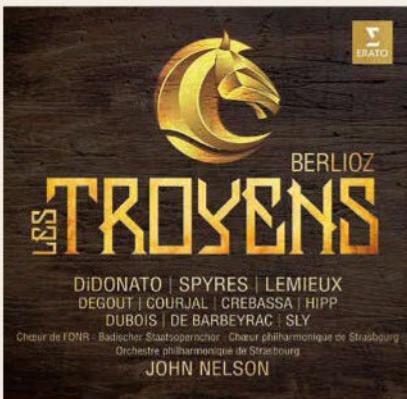
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GRAMOPHONE Editor's choice G

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



BERLIOZ
Les Troyens
Sols; Strasbourg
Philharmonic Chorus
and Orchestra /
John Nelson
Erato
► **MARK PULLINGER'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 56**

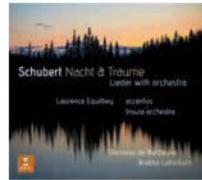
Take some of today's best singers, a conductor steeped in Berlioz's sound world and the commitment of an ever-enterprising label, and the result is a landmark recording of this epic.



'GRANDISSIMA GRAVITA'
Rachel Podger *vn*
Brecon Baroque
Channel Classics
Splendid music-

making from an artist, Rachel Podger, whose own performances are matched by her ability to inspire her colleagues.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 80**



Laurence Equilbey

Erato

Fresh from Paris's newest venue come these orchestrations of Schubert songs.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 103**



'SECRETS'
Marianne Crebassa *mez*
Fazil Say *pf*

Erato
Fin de siècle song from Duparc to late Fauré

forms the basis of this impressive recital, Crebassa's tone and shading ideal in this repertoire, well matched throughout by pianist Fazil Say.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 107**



DVD/BLU-RAY

MONTEVERDI L'Orfeo
Soloists; Les Arts Florissants / Paul Agnew

Harmonia Mundi

Having excelled in Monteverdi's Madrigals, Paul Agnew and Les Arts Florissants turn to *L'Orfeo*.

The players are put on stage, part of the action or, as critic David Vickers puts it, part of 'democratic music-making'.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 112**



GRANADOS
Goyescas
José Menor *pf*
IBS Classical
José Menor is a committed champion

of the music of Spain and Granados, and on the strength of this wonderful performance, what a gift to his country's culture he clearly is.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 90**



'GOLD'
The King's Singers
Signum
What better way for the ever-impressive King's Singers to mark

their half century than by new recordings exploring the rich diversity of repertoire – modern, early, sacred and secular – for which they are known?

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 104**

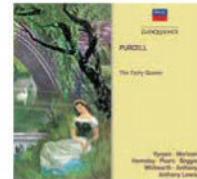


DEBUSSY
Pelléas et Mélisande
Sols; London Symphony Chorus and Orchestra /
Sir Simon Rattle

LSO Live

Expectations are high for Sir Simon Rattle's new partnership with the LSO; this is a work he clearly loves, and the result bodes well for all that lies ahead.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 110**



Decca Eloquence
The Fairy Queen's first recording, reissued.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 114**



BACH Magnificat
Monteverdi Choir;
English Baroque Soloists /
Sir John Eliot Gardiner
Soli Deo Gloria
Sir John Eliot

Gardiner's new recording celebrates music Bach wrote for Christmas in Leipzig – a release stamped with his hallmark of musical excellence.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 96**



'PARLE QUI VEUT'
Sollazzo Ensemble

Linn

This album emerged from the York Early Music Young Artists

Competition – and the competition's 2015 winners here offer vivid, charismatic and skilful performances of this 14th-century music.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 107**



'MIRAGES'
Sabine Devieilhe *sop*
Alexandre Tharaud *pf*
Les Siècles / François-Xavier Roth

Erato

2016's Recital Award winner takes us, like Crebassa's 'Secrets', to *fin de siècle* France – this time, however, to the opera stage. Wonderful, glorious music-making.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 119**

REISSUE/ARCHIVE

PURCELL
The Fairy Queen
Soloists; Boyd
Neel Orchestra /
Anthony Lewis

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FOR THE RECORD



Kožená–Pentatone partnership revealed

Last month we interviewed Magdalena Kožená about her forthcoming release on the Pentatone label, a chamber recital of songs by Dvořák and Janáček among others.

The acclaimed mezzo-soprano has now announced that this partnership with Pentatone is to be 'a long-term one', which will span a diverse repertoire – 'from Baroque opera to contemporary art song, from Rameau to Berio', as Pentatone puts it – across several albums.

'It is amazing when any company is still recording these days, even more so when they are willing to take risks with unusual repertoire and unexpected combinations, which are often the first things that come to my mind,' said Kožená of the signing. 'What a treasure it is for me to be part of the Pentatone family. I look forward to many happy collaborations.'

Recording that recent chamber music disc saw her joined in the studio by Wolfram Brandl and Rahel Rilling on violin, Yulia Deyneca on viola, Dávid Adorján on cello, Andrew Marriner on clarinet and Kaspar Zehnder on flute, along with Sir Simon Rattle, her husband, in his first-ever appearance as a pianist on record.

ECM now available for streaming



ECM has entered the streaming age

The entire recording catalogue of ECM Records, including the ECM New Series imprint, is now available to stream on platforms worldwide, including Apple Music, Spotify, Amazon Music, Deezer, Qobuz and Tidal.

The label – known for its quality of sound, visual identity and wide range of projects, from core repertoire to intriguing collaborations – is led by visionary founder Manfred Eicher.

ECM's best-known releases feature music and performances by the likes of Arvo Pärt, András Schiff, Steve Reich, Keith Jarrett and Jan Garbarek. In 2003, Schumann's String Quartets Nos 1 and 3 from the Zehetmair Quartet won *Gramophone*'s Recording of the Year; ECM was also named Label of the Year in 2009.

ECM has previously been among the most high-profile of labels to resist streaming. Explaining its recent decision, the label said: 'Although ECM's preferred mediums remain the CD and LP, the first priority is that the music should be heard. The physical catalogue and the original authorship are the crucial references for us: the complete ECM album with its artistic signature, best possible sound quality, sequence and dramaturgy intact, telling its story from beginning to end. In recent years, ECM and the musicians have had to face unauthorised streaming of recordings via video-sharing sites, plus piracy, bootlegs, and a proliferation of illegal download sites. It was important to make the catalogue accessible within a framework where copyrights are respected.'

Its new streaming availability comes as a result of a distribution partnership with Universal Music Group, owners of Deutsche Grammophon and Decca. Clemens Trautmann, President of DG, said: 'I would like to thank Manfred Eicher for placing his trust in Universal Music Group and Deutsche Grammophon. We are delighted to work on bringing the precious ECM catalogue to digital platforms.'

Gramophone has produced an ECM playlist to help you explore the label through streaming – visit gramophone.co.uk for details.

BBC Concert Orchestra: new chief

The BBC Concert Orchestra has announced the appointment of Bramwell Tovey as its new Principal Conductor, starting in January for an initial five-year period.

Renowned for excellence in an extraordinarily diverse repertoire, from light music to cross-genre collaborations, the BBC Concert Orchestra is also part of the world's longest-running live orchestral music radio programme, BBC Radio 2's *Friday Night is Music Night*.

Tovey takes over from Keith Lockhart, who now becomes Chief Guest Conductor. Tovey is currently Music Director of the Vancouver SO, a post he has held since 2000, but he'll step down next year; he has also held posts with the Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg (2002-06), and the Winnipeg SO (1989-2001).

'The BBC Concert Orchestra is a wonderful ensemble of exceptional musicians,' said Tovey. 'Its activities in music education, its commitment to contemporary music and the work of composer-in-residence Dobrinka Tabakova are all of particular interest to me. I am very excited about leading the BBC Concert Orchestra in the years ahead.'

MTT to step down in San Francisco



End of an era: MTT has served the SFSO since 1974

Michael Tilson Thomas has announced that he will step down as Music Director of San Francisco Symphony Orchestra at the end of the 2019-20 season. MTT, as he's widely and affectionately known, will have served in the post for 25 years. He will go on to assume the title of Music Director Laureate and continue to conduct the orchestra for a minimum of four weeks each season.

'Having been a Music Director of an orchestra for most of my adult life and as I approach my 75th birthday, I feel this is an appropriate moment to set aside some of my administrative responsibilities and begin a new period of creative possibilities,' Tilson Thomas said. 'Fortunately my new and unique relationship as Music Director Laureate will allow me to continue to work with my esteemed colleagues for years to come on projects close to my heart.'

The conductor first appeared with the SFSO in 1974 as a 29-year-old when he conducted Mahler's Ninth Symphony. He went on to make a speciality of Mahler's music, recording a complete cycle of the symphonies with the SFSO for its own label. As well as earning acclaim for excellence in an eclectic range of repertoire, his period on the podium has also seen him lead innovative new media projects, one of which – the 'Keeping Score' series – has introduced many people to classical music, largely due to MTT's easygoing and engaging manner in front of the camera.

ONE TO WATCH

Stanislas de Barbeyrac Tenor

You could never accuse Stanislas de Barbeyrac of failing to make his mark in this issue of *Gramophone*. First off, you'll be encountering the tenor's name among the star-studded and hugely impressive cast on our Recording of the Month, Berlioz's *Les Troyens*. But it's in the well-crafted album of orchestrated Schubert songs conducted by Laurence Equilbey – 'Nacht und Träume' (an Editor's Choice) – that he stands out the most. 'One is struck by the high quality of Stanislas de Barbeyrac's singing,' writes our critic Hugo Shirley. 'His interpretations are sensitive and intelligent and his tenor is beautifully controlled – flexible but steely, plangent with bracing hints of the heroic.'

Born in France in 1984, he studied at the Conservatoire de musique de Bordeaux. His career to date has been that mixture of opera and oratorio – from Verdi and Wagner to Mendelssohn and Haydn – which forms the firm foundation of many a singer's path.

Conductor Equilbey, in last month's interview with Charlotte Gardner about the Schubert recording, described de Barbeyrac as 'a rising star'. His appearance on the



'Rising star': French tenor Stanislas de Barbeyrac

two Erato discs this month means he is clearly firmly in the consciousness of one of today's leading A&R figures, Alain Lanceron – President of Erato and Warner Classics. On their recommendation, and that of our critics, we'd suggest he should be in yours too.

GRAMOPHONE Online

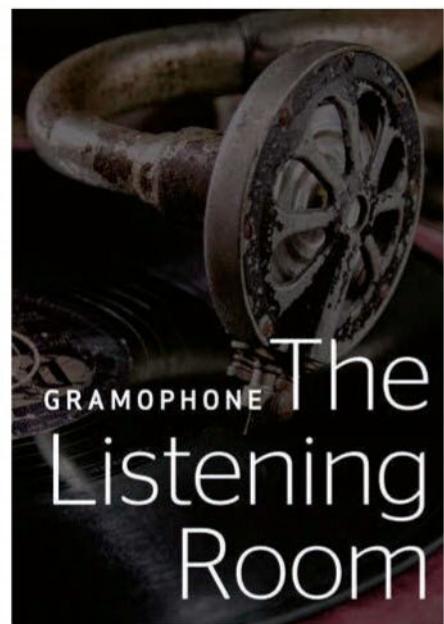
The magazine is just the beginning. Visit gramophone.co.uk for ...

Podcasts

In the first of two fascinating *Gramophone* podcasts, Editor Martin Cullingford meets Richard Tognetti, violinist and Artistic Director of the Australian Chamber Orchestra, to discuss a recording project that contrasts the old with the new. In the second podcast, Rory McCleery, Music Director of the Marian Consort, discusses his new recording of contemporary motets dedicated to the Virgin Mary, featuring composers such as Judith Weir and James MacMillan.

Audio Gift Guide

With Christmas just around the corner, don't miss our guide to the best audio products on the market. Audio Editor Andrew Everard has handpicked 10 great audio gift ideas, suitable for every budget, including the Amazon Echo Dot, the Denon Envaya Pocket and the Onkyo hi-res digital music player.



The Listening Room

Enjoy Editor-in-Chief James Jolly's new playlist series via 'The Listening Room' blog channel on the *Gramophone* website. Every week James explores the most interesting new releases. Each episode is available to enjoy on Spotify, Apple Music and Qobuz.

IN THE STUDIO

Ex Cathedra are heading to the studio in January to record choral works by Roxanna Panufnik for Signum. The album is due out in September. The American **Neave Trio** have just recorded their second album for Chandos. The group's recording of piano trios by Debussy, Fauré and Rousset is due for release in the summer. Tenor **Nicholas Phan** was in New Jersey in October, putting the finishing touches to his fifth recording for Avie, due out in April. In song-cycles by Debussy, Fauré and Britten, he was joined by pianist Myra Huang, the Telegraph Quartet and The Knights. **Vasily Petrenko** was in Oslo

in October conducting the Oslo Philharmonic in Richard Strauss's *Don Juan* and *Till Eulenspiegel* for a recording on LAWO Classics, due for release in spring 2019. Continuing its **European Music Archaeology Project** (EMAP), Delphian was in Weissenburg, Germany, recently to record a water organ. The results can be heard on Volume 5, due out in August 2018. Bass **Christopher Purves** was one of several soloists to join Ensemble Diderot and violinist/director Johannes Pramsohler at the Abbaye Royale de Fontevraud in October. Their disc of 17th-century German cantatas is due out on Audax in April.

STUDIO FOCUS *Rachel Podger*

The violinist on Brecon Baroque's recording of Vivaldi's Four Seasons for Channel Classics, due out in the spring

Vivaldi based his pieces on poems - what role did these play in this recording?

I was very keen to get to know the poems really well, and just read them out loud in Italian to hear the language. I then had an Italian friend of mine translate them word for word; this was really interesting because the results were slightly different from the English translations which, to make it rhyme, can change expressions and words. For example, the instruction at the beginning of *Summer* is 'exhausted' - *languido* in Italian - and some of the translations just say 'hot' or 'tired', both of which don't have quite the same flavour. So it was important for me to understand these poems and see what Vivaldi was doing in the score. We just tried to develop our own story - because it is a story, and it's the closest you really get to being an actor.

How was the rapport with your players?

I love playing with Brecon Baroque because even though I'm the so-called director I don't



First among equals: Podger acknowledges that each player contributes to the session

feel like I need to be - I just respect everyone on the same level, and everyone is always bringing something to the sessions, whatever part they're playing. It really does feel like we're performing chamber music. A lot of the time during these recording sessions we were working things out together. In general with Brecon Baroque, I'll often come up with the first idea and then we'll try it out but if it becomes obvious that it's not working someone else will say, 'How about doing it *this* way?', or, 'Why don't we try *this*?'

It all adds up. On the first day I'll go shopping and bring loads of fruit and biscuits, and feel like a mother hen! The rapport between me, producer Jonathan Freeman-Attwood and Jared Sacks, owner of Channel Classics, is very easy. We've worked together for 20 years now, and we just know each other very well - there's a lot of banter between us. It's light-hearted in the best sense, so when there is a tricky moment - maybe we don't get what we want and have to do it again, or there's a feeling of anxiety or something like that - we're kind of bolstered to cope with it.

Where did you record it?

At St Jude-on-the-Hill, in Hampstead. I've recorded a few things there - my Biber Rosary Sonatas and 'Grandissima Gravita', the disc that has just come out, [see page 80]. We really like the atmosphere and ambience. The sound is great. And most importantly there is a kitchen so you can make coffee!

How important are these external elements to a successful session?



'Mountain': amazing footage, magnificent score

Tognetti's music takes to the peaks

Violinist Richard Tognetti has made a significant contribution to a new film, *Mountain*, to be released in cinemas on December 15. Directed by Jennifer Peedom, the film is an extraordinary, heart-stoppingly beautiful blend of image, music and word. Exploring man's fascination with - and determination to conquer - some of the highest peaks on our planet, the film places music in a central role (played by Tognetti's fine Australian

Chamber Orchestra) alongside a sparse but expressive narration by Robert Macfarlane (spoken by William Dafoe). Tognetti assembled the score, which combines well-known pieces by Vivaldi, Grieg, Pärt, Chopin and Sculthorpe with his own compositions. At one point, there's also a magnificent performance of the slow movement of Beethoven's Violin Concerto. Amazing footage makes for a truly engrossing experience.

DENON CLASSICS from Japan, renowned worldwide as the label for exquisite sound and high-quality classical music, is making its return to the world stage! Enjoy outstanding performances in high-resolution sound, performed by artists with the power to electrify listeners.



Stanislav Skrowaczewski (conductor)

Legendary performances by the late virtuoso conductor, featuring a top Japanese orchestra.

Beethoven: Symphonies No.2-5, 7

Bruckner: Symphonies No.0, 7-9

Shostakovich: Symphonies No.1, 5, 10, 11

Brahms: Symphonies No.1, 3, 4

Schumann: Symphonies No.1-4

R.Strauss: Also Sprach Zarathustra



Andrea Battistoni (conductor)

Italian genius who summons tremendous energy from the orchestra, resulting in a unique and extraordinary experience.

Respighi: Roman Trilogy

Puccini: Turandot

Beethoven: Symphony No.9

Stravinsky: The Rite of Spring

Mahler: Symphony No.1

Mussorgsky: Tableaux D'une Exposition

Tchaikovsky: Symphony No.5



Kyohei Sorita (piano)

Drawing audiences of 20,000 on a recent Japanese tour, Sorita is renowned as the most powerful young pianist in Japan.

LISZT

La Campanella, Liebesträume, Consolations No.3, Tarantella, Etudes d'exécution transcendante No.4&10

RACHMANINOV

Piano Concerto No.2/ Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini

RECITAL PIECES Vol.1

Schubert: 4 Impromptus D.899; Ravel: Pavane pour une infant défunte; Debussy: L'Isle Joyeuse, Clair de Lune; Schumann/Liszt: Widmung; Chopin: Etude No.3



Kohei Ueno (classical saxophone)

Affecting listeners on a level of feeling that transcends sounds, Ueno is a pioneer, leading the way to the next generation of classical saxophone.

MESSAGE TO ADOLPHE

Takashi Yoshimatsu: Fuzzy Bird Sonata; Alfred Reed: Ballade; Paul Creston: Saxophone Sonata; and other works

LISTEN TO...

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J.S.Bach: Cello Suite No. 1; Flute Partita; Violin Partita No.2; Air on the G String

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ARTISTS & THEIR INSTRUMENTS

Alexandra Dariescu on her very first piano, the 'Tchaikovsky'

“I was four years old when my mother bought us our first piano. It had always been her dream to have her own piano at home. She had wanted to play since she was a girl but her family couldn't afford to buy an instrument, so her grandparents would draw the keys on pieces of paper and she'd sit at the table and pretend to play. When she finally started playing properly, she learnt by ear.

I was born in 1985 in communist Romania. At that time, it was very difficult for anyone to have private lessons or to play an instrument. But my mum was very careful with her money and saved a little each month. After a couple of years, she was able to put down the deposit for our piano – the total cost was 11 times her annual salary, and it took her a very long time to pay the balance.

Believe it or not, the piano is called the 'Tchaikovsky'. It's a Russian upright, and it was made in 1988 – the year before my mother bought it. There was a music shop in our hometown of Iași, and only one piano a year came to the shop to be sold. When my mother heard about the 'Tchaikovsky', she knew she had to have it. She bought it just before the Romanian Revolution in December 1989 – if she had waited any longer, all the money she had saved would have been worthless. So it was obviously meant to be.

It's made of mahogany – a really beautiful colour – and has a very mellow, velvety sound. Whenever I go home, I still play it – it brings back such special memories. When I was seven, my mum took me to a specialist school because she thought I had a good ear. I got in straight away and when I was nine I performed my first concerto with an orchestra – Mozart's No 26 in D – which was



the biggest thing ever! I remember at one point my piano teacher saying, 'We should sell that upright and invest more money in something better', but my mother said, 'I would really like to keep it'. It was one of the dearest possessions she had, and I'm so grateful to her for all the sacrifices she made to buy it. It's part of me, it's part of my childhood – it's where it all started.

I remember it was quite difficult to practise on – when I played the piano at school it always felt easier by comparison. But you have to be adaptable as a pianist. There have been times when I've had to go straight into a concert because of a delayed flight or some other disaster, or found myself on a challenging instrument at a concert in the middle of nowhere, but you still have to find the voice of each piano – I consider them to be human for some reason. You have to trust

whatever instrument you're playing but also learn to take risks in order to let it sing. The easiest thing is to have a beautifully prepared, extraordinary piano but you'll appreciate that more if, in the past, you've been challenged to make a good job out of a difficult piano.

At home in London, I'm lucky to have my own piano, a Yamaha C3. When I was a student, first at the Royal Northern College of Music and then at the Guildhall, I remember waking up at 6am every morning to get in the queue for the practice rooms. All the porters knew me because I was always first in line! But when I finished college, I was a pianist without a piano. Lots of students have this problem – and if you're without a piano, how can you be really be a pianist? But I was very blessed because, in 2012, I won £6000 at the Verbier Festival Academy – the condition was that you had to put it towards buying or hiring an instrument. I'm very entrepreneurial so I did a fundraising campaign and raised another £15,000. I went to people who knew me and believed in me and they donated – we're lucky in the UK that there are so many who are willing to help. And so I was able to buy myself a brand new Yamaha C3 which I chose from the factory in Milton Keynes. It's a real workhorse! It's heavy but with a mellow tone, and it's brilliant for practising. It's very different to our piano back in Romania – it's a grand piano, not an upright, and my mum was so happy when she saw it for the first time! ♪

'The Nutcracker and I, by Alexandra Dariescu, for piano, ballerina and digital animation, is premiered on December 19 at Milton Court – visit barbican.org.uk; the same programme will be available in a special book and CD set on Signum – visit alexandradariescu.com

Debut disc for Canterbury girls

Canterbury Cathedral formed its girls choir in 2014. Now, just three years later, the choir, comprising choristers aged 12-18, has recorded its debut disc on the Decca label. Perfectly timed for Christmas (it has just been released), the disc features a selection of traditional carols as well as a new work by the British composer Rebecca Dale.

Colin Currie launches own label

One of today's most acclaimed percussionists has launched his own label. Colin Currie Records – which launches with Steve Reich's *Drumming*, out in March – promises to offer 'a platform for the soloist's

diverse projects', including the championing of contemporary British composers. The likes of James MacMillan and Mark-Anthony Turnage have already written for Currie, and there are works from Helen Grime, Harrison Birtwistle and Simon Holt to come – so there should be plenty of material to choose from. Watch this space!

LA Phil appoints new CEO

Simon Woods has been announced as the new CEO of the Los Angeles Philharmonic – one of the most high-profile executive posts in the orchestral world. Woods is currently CEO of the Seattle Symphony; prior to that, he was Chief Executive at the RSNO. He replaces Deborah Borda who, after 17 years in LA, returned to the New York Philharmonic in May.

FROM WHERE I SIT

The myriad juxtapositions of style in Bernstein's Mass is liberating, not cheesy, says Edward Seckerson



Impossible though it may seem, it was in December 1989 – a staggering 28 years ago – that *Gramophone* put me and Leonard Bernstein in the same room together. It was an extraordinary hour, the details of which I shall never forget and indeed have now chosen to enshrine in a cabaret-like entertainment – *Bernstein Revealed* – which will kick off the centenary of his birth as part of the Barbican's Total Immersion weekend next month. 2018 is going to be a year full of Bernstein – the music, the man, the ethos.

For me personally, it was always Bernstein's ability to embrace music in all its manifold guises that I found real kinship with. He had a nose for theatre, which I shared, he adored genre-hopping, which I totally related to, and he composed as he conducted – in the moment. I still maintain that *Mass* – *A Theatre Piece for Singers, Players and Dancers* is his most important work. Not just on account of its virtuosity and the brilliant 'gamesmanship' of its composition but because it demonstrates how music can transcend all the social, political and religious barriers imposed upon it. In other words, if you are truly musical then the joy lies not in what separates us but what unites us. Those who find *Mass* tasteless or cheesy or even embarrassing in its myriad juxtapositions of style – like Bernstein himself the piece wants, needs, to experience it all – should perhaps be examining their musical inhibitions and the reasons for them. *Mass* should be liberating. That's what Bernstein – the man, the musician, the composer – personified.

It wasn't easy for him. When *Gramophone* confirmed a cover-feature interview tied to the new recording of his bountiful quasi-operetta *Candide* I resolved to focus only on Bernstein, the composer. In the event it was the right decision – and certainly the surest way to his heart. Because what was so startling – and so touching – about that interview was how openly he acknowledged the hurt inflicted on him by so many of his musical contemporaries failing to take him seriously as a composer. Could it be that this misplaced insecurity was at the root of his attempts to 'elevate' glorious theatre works like *West Side Story* and *Candide* to be what they were not, casting them inappropriately and inflating them to the point where something as glorious as 'Make our garden grow' from *Candide* aspired (why?) to be Mahler's *Resurrection Symphony*?

It is well chronicled that Bernstein explored ways in which he could be more 'cutting edge' (whatever that means) – but the realisation was always there that he could only really be himself. And with such gifts (not least as a melodist, that dying art), why would he want to be otherwise? The irony is that, had he lived just a few more years, he would have seen terrific works like his *Serenade* for violin, strings and percussion and *Symphony No 2*, *The Age of Anxiety*, enter the core repertoire. Both those works use variational techniques to affect a sense of constant evolution. How poetic that today, 27 years after his death, we effectively experience a succession of new beginnings each time we hear them.



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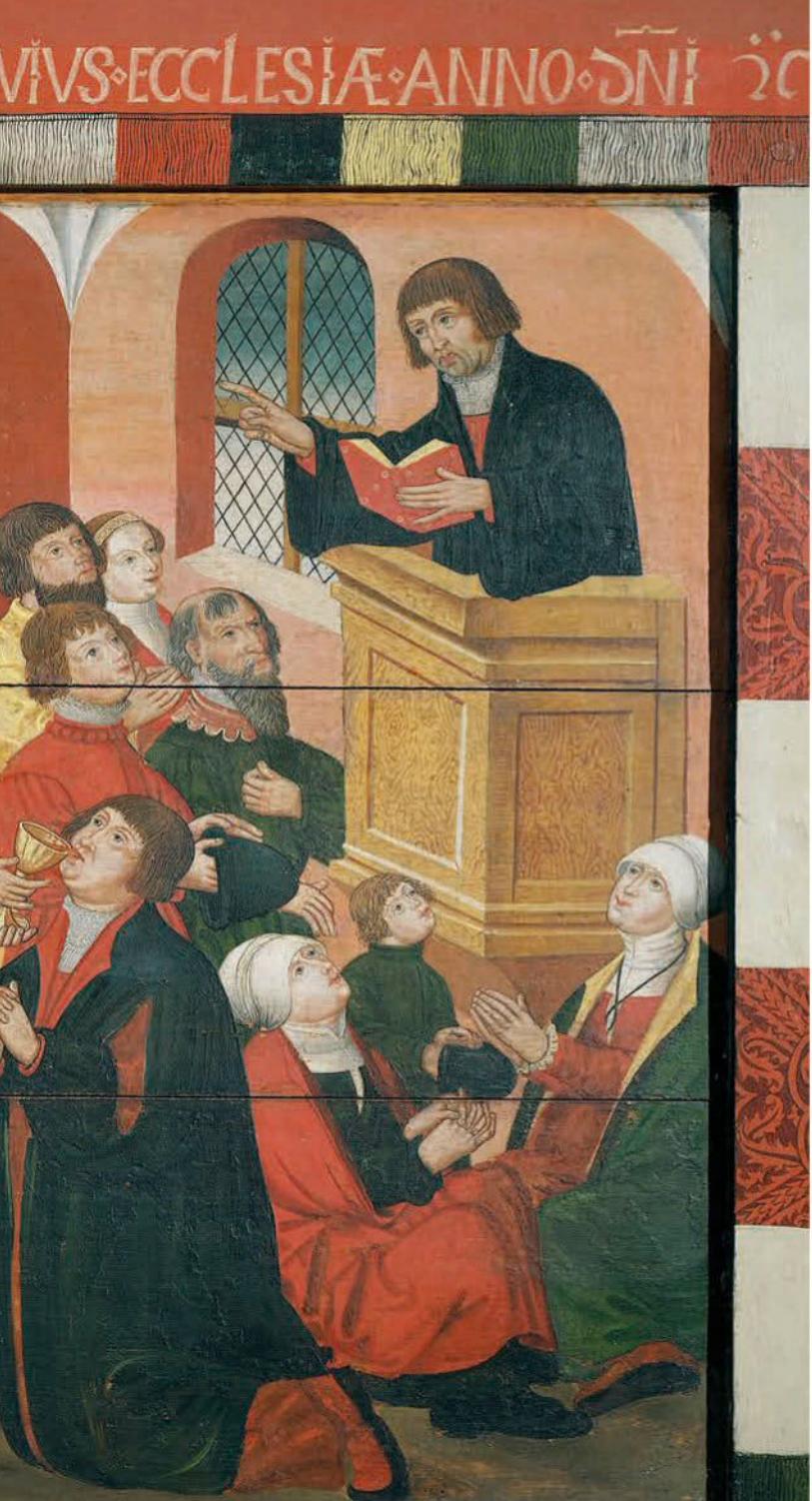


VLA ADORIATA FUIT CONSILO D. IOANNIS IACOBI PASTORIS H



HOW MARTIN LUTHER CHANGED MUSIC

In commemoration of 500 years since Martin Luther's declaration of his '95 Theses', Fabrice Fitch considers the wide-ranging influence of the Reformation on the music of Luther's day – and beyond



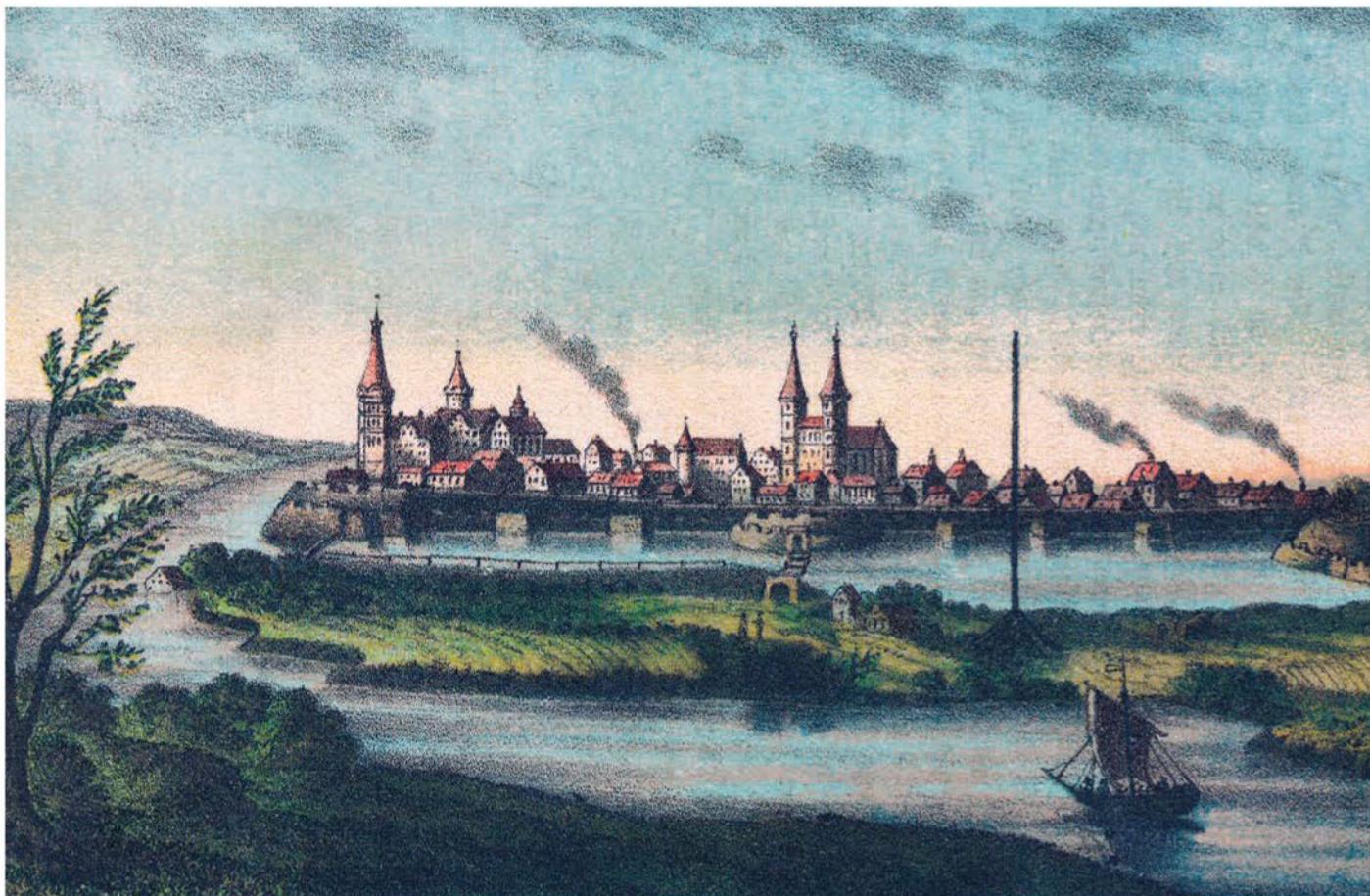
Martin Luther (1483-1546) preaching to the faithful and receiving communion, as depicted in a panel from the altar of Torslunde Church, Denmark (1561)

PHOTOGRAPHY: BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

Martin Luther loved music. Not only was he knowledgeable, but he knew his Josquin from his Isaac. His famous saying that Josquin was ‘the master of the notes, who must do as he wishes, whereas other composers do what the notes require’ is only one of several similar sentiments ascribed to him. He had a fine, if light, voice and could hold his own in domestic music-making. But his devotion to music transcended connoisseurship, even proficiency: he believed it to be essential to the education of children and the training of future pastors: ‘I place music next to theology and accord it highest praise.’ One of Luther’s earliest theological writings concerned the Psalms; coincidentally, the most famous of Josquin’s psalm settings (such as the five-voice *De profundis* or the *Miserere*) date from the years after 1500, and were thus broadly contemporary with the genesis of Luther’s ideas. That period also saw a surge in polyphonic settings of Psalms by younger composers such as Nicolas Champion and Mathurin Forestier, more than likely in emulation of these late works of Josquin. Luther himself corresponded directly with one of the leading German-speaking composers of this younger generation, Ludwig Senfl, requesting him to set the Latin psalm text *In pace in idipsum* to music. Senfl’s setting appears to have been lost, but he also sent Luther a setting of another psalm text (*Non moriar*), written in the stylistic wake of Josquin’s generation. Luther must surely have been pleased with it, for he sent the composer a chest of books to express his gratitude.

Luther’s insistence that individuals should participate in worship had a direct impact on music – it needed to be simple enough for the faithful to learn and remember

Luther’s stance in relation to music is interesting precisely because this most prominent of the Reformation’s founding fathers was in no way opposed to the polyphony fostered by the Catholic church. That having been said, the Reformation was a wide-ranging movement with many roots, and the attitude of some other key figures was ambivalent, to say the least. In England, two determined attempts at radical breaks quickly followed one another, the first under the proto-Puritan Edward VI (r1547-53), the second under his Catholic half-sister Mary (r1553-58). They died too early for their efforts to succeed, but in any case such uncompromising stances as theirs were comparatively rare; the policy of their half-sister and successor Elizabeth I (r1558-1603) was much more typical. While embracing Protestantism she retained some aspects of the Catholic liturgy, not least the cultivation of Latin polyphony alongside the vernacular. Although this was especially pragmatic, elsewhere some form of accommodation with previous practice was the rule rather than the exception. In some cases, as we shall soon see, this two-pronged approach created some rather surprising bedfellows, musically speaking. Meanwhile, the vogue for psalm settings underlines the point that even staunchly Catholic areas were alive to trends that chimed with the concerns of reformers. In many ways, the music written for Catholic worship in the years after Luther’s death in 1546 bears the Reformation’s imprint as well, albeit expressed at times as an opposite reaction. What follows in these pages can hardly do justice to the full impact of the Reformation on music, but I will attempt to draw attention to some of its most surprising and far-reaching aspects.



A cityscape of 16th-century Wittenberg, the German town in which Luther lived and preached; 500 years ago, he nailed his 95 Theses to the door of its Castle Church

LUTHER: BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

Luther's critique of the Catholic church centred on two issues. The immediate catalyst was the corruption epitomised by the sale of indulgences. This affected liturgical music to the extent that the majority of singers and composers were churchmen, their salaries deriving from a complex system of benefices run by the church; as such, they could be tarred with the same brush as countless other clerics who were similarly employed and whose personal conduct was all too often at odds with what they preached. More far-reaching was Luther's doctrinal challenge, questioning the very necessity of these intermediaries between God, his Word and individuals' salvation. This radically altered the conception of worship from a series of actions performed by the priest and his assistants on behalf of an attendant congregation to one in which the congregation was directly implicated,

individually and collectively. Here again, it's important not to draw too firm a distinction, for the church was beginning to address the ways in which the faithful might be involved; but Luther's insistence that individuals should not only understand what was said on their behalf but participate entailed changes on many fronts, some of which had a direct impact on music. For one thing, music needed to be simple enough for the faithful to learn and remember – a tune, then, rather than polyphony requiring specialist training and performers; and it needed to set not Latin but the vernacular. A new repertory of tunes had notionally to be drawn up to set the new texts, not least those penned by Luther. Much as he appreciated polyphony, Luther

Martin Luther's direct impact on music was perhaps greater than that of any spiritual leader in Western history

also grasped this practical imperative, and in the composer Johann Walter (d1570) he found a willing collaborator. Walter's musical training was a traditional one, and his polyphonic works show his allegiance to prevailing contrapuntal styles; but his 1524 publication of German hymns (or more accurately, devotional songs) – the first of its kind – included a preface by Luther and was an instant success. Although the precise extent of Luther's musical involvement is debated, there is little doubt that he composed the music of at least some of these chorales, and had a hand in adapting others.

The prestige that Luther's direct association with chorale melodies conferred on them – most famously *Ein feste Burg* and *Vom Himmel hoch* – is borne out by their subsequent use by countless composers thereafter. But their style didn't arise out of a vacuum. Listen to the contemporary German devotional tune

Maria zart, strongly associated with Catholic worship, and you hear a nearly identical syllabic treatment of the text, with frequent pauses; or listen to *Innsbruck, ich muss dich lassen*, attributed to Isaac, and there is again an air of familiarity – all the more so that the famous tune was soon adapted as a chorale and set much later by Brahms, with just the first word of the opening line changed ('O Welt, ich muss dich lassen' – 'O world, I must leave you'). The background to all this is the repertory of monophonic German tunes widely known as the 'Tenorlied', which could be sacred or secular. Composers working in German-speaking lands, like Heinrich Isaac and the aforementioned Senfl, Isaac's pupil, routinely set

these tunes to elaborate polyphony. Walter and his associates knew this tradition intimately. That the chorale was so crucial to the sense of Lutheran identity explains why composers like Bach and his librettists could structure entire cantatas around individual ones, like a sermon around a short scriptural passage; but the idea of ornamenting and varying those tunes in as many ways as possible arose from centuries of polyphonic reworkings of pre-existent melodies. That said, this approach remained at the heart of Lutheran music for centuries, even as the rest of Europe was gradually moving away from the use of pre-existent materials, even in sacred music. In that sense, Luther's direct impact on music was perhaps greater than that of any spiritual leader in Western history, barring the semi-mythical contribution of the early medieval Pope Gregory I.

EARLY PROTESTANT COMPOSERS

Think of Lutheran music and the names Bach or Schütz first spring to mind. But these lay some way in the future. In fact, composers reacted to Luther – and to the Reformation more widely – right from the start. The short-lived but immensely gifted Thomas Stoltzer composed a lavish polyphonic setting of Luther's translation of Psalm 37, *Erzürne dich nicht* in the early 1520s at the specific request of his Catholic Habsburg patron, Queen Mary of Hungary. From Luther's immediate circle it is mostly the monophonic music that is best known today, though within a few years polyphonic settings in German began circulating – notably by Luther's early collaborator, Walter, and, a little later, Caspar Othmayr (d1553). But the first grand compendium of Lutheran musical styles comes with Michael Praetorius, whose first publications overlap with those of Schütz (although Praetorius was over a decade older and died much earlier). Like his younger colleague, Praetorius's output encompasses splendid polychoral works and more intimate devotional ones; but unlike Schütz, he also left organ variations on chorale melodies whose scale and invention stand comparison with those of Sweelinck.

Reformed denominations prevailed in Northern Europe, while Catholicism was broadly maintained in the South. The situation in France was more complicated, owing to the influence of Jean Calvin, based in Geneva but largely educated in French universities. His attitude to music was far more intransigent than Luther's: he considered polyphony a positive distraction, advocating that even instruments should not be used for devotion. The Genevan Psalter and related publications were the Calvinist answer to the Lutheran chorale. Their texts were derived exclusively from French translations of the Psalms, but the music avoided adaptations of secular tunes due to their undesirable previous associations. They were very influential in France, where the poet Clément Marot contributed his own psalm translations, whose literary quality was such that they were sung at the royal court and set by Huguenot composers such as Claude Le Jeune and Claude Goudimel. Soon, however, the Catholic King Francis I was persuaded that the French-Protestant Huguenots represented a challenge to his authority and began persecuting them in earnest, a policy that reached a climax in the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572, ordered by one of Francis's grandsons (and in the course of which the avowedly Protestant Goudimel was murdered).

Up until that point, Huguenot composers had happily set psalms in French polyphonically, the practice being sanctioned at the highest level – at least to begin with; and unlike the Calvinists, they had no qualms turning pre-existing secular songs by the likes of Lassus or Janequin to devotional use. After all, these songs were very well known; everyone

CHRISTMAS OLD & NEW ON DELPHIAN



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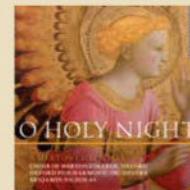
Music for the Queen of Heaven: contemporary Marian motets

The Marian Consort / Rory McCleery

The Marian Consort has made its name over the past decade with the music of the Renaissance, including in six acclaimed Delphian recordings. But the group has also worked regularly with living composers for a number of years. This programme of Marian anthems – many of them commissioned by the ensemble – celebrates a living, developing tradition where the new is always informed by the old, casting fresh, vital light on these ancient words.

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— The Scotsman, October 2017, FIVE STARS

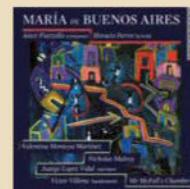


DCD34192

O Holy Night: A Merton Christmas

Choir of Merton College, Oxford; Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra / Benjamin Nicholas

The Choir of Merton College joins forces with the Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra for a recording of director Benjamin Nicholas's favourite carols. Two of John Rutter's most exquisite works are complemented by orchestral versions of well-loved traditional fare. From the ecstatic brass fanfares that introduce *O come, all ye faithful* and *Hark! the herald-angels sing* to the intimate performances of Elizabeth Poston's *Jesus Christ the apple tree* and Morten Lauridsen's *O magnum mysterium*, Christmas old and new is celebrated with a fresh sense of all its magic and glory. The choir and orchestra loved making this recording, and it shows.



DCD34186 (2 discs)

Piazzolla: María de Buenos Aires

Valentina Montoya Martínez, Nicholas Mulroy, Juanjo López Vidal narrator, Mr McFall's Chamber, Victor Villena bandoneón/music director

Who is María? Horacio Ferrer, lyricist of this unconventional 'operita', said that she was a representation of Buenos Aires, embodying the spirit of tango itself. *María de Buenos Aires* lies outside any known genre, and according to Ferrer its highly poetic libretto was written 'not to be understood, but to create emotion and atmosphere'. Piazzolla's music, too, offers a charged mix of classical forms and Argentinian traditions – *milonga*, tango and the sparring spoken word of the traditional *payada*. In this, the first major recording since the 1980s, Delphian stalwarts Mr McFall's Chamber are joined by their long-term collaborators Valentina Montoya Martínez, Nicholas Mulroy, and internationally acclaimed tango musicians Victor Villena and Cyril Garac.

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recognised them and could fit new words to them. Poets adapted their texts so that even a thoroughly smutty original was easily recognisable in the new version. In one extraordinary example, the first line of Janequin's *Il estoit une fillette* is retained so that the randy young woman of the original version becomes the Virgin Mary about to give birth. The rest of the text sticks as close to its source as possible while replacing the song's carnal allusions with references to the Christmas Story. (Calvin would have been horrified.) These adaptations were popular with Catholic and Protestant audiences alike. If this seems surprising from a modern perspective, it's worth remembering that the French Wars of Religion were eventually resolved when a Huguenot cousin of the commissioner of the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre eventually succeeded him as king, at the price of embracing Catholicism.

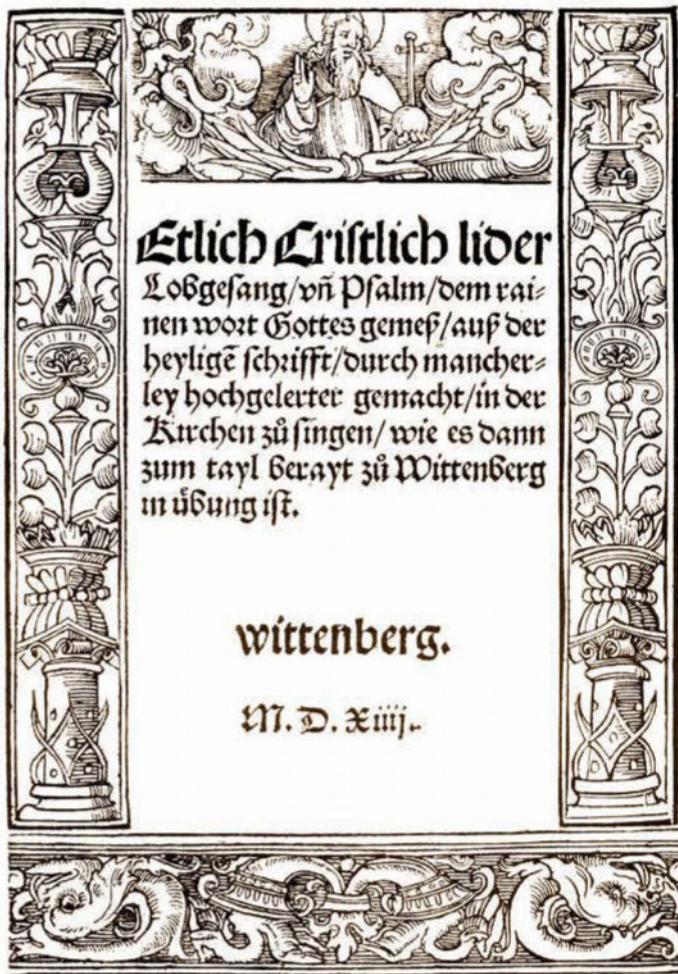
In its way, the restrained polyphony of the Huguenots

is as moving a response to the Reformation as the more elaborate efforts of their German-speaking colleagues, which they predate to some extent.

Ironically, given Calvin's view on the matter, the tunes of the Genevan Psalter were to receive virtuoso treatment in the work of the Dutchman Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck, a near-exact contemporary of Praetorius. His polyphonic settings of the entire Psalter in French, which occupied the whole of his creative life, are a monumental achievement, building on Goudimel and Clemens non Papa, whose *Souterliedekens* set devotional texts polyphonically in Dutch a generation earlier. And his organ music includes several settings of the same tunes.

Working in the lead-up to the centenary of Luther's first manifesto, Praetorius and Sweelinck arguably set the seal on the first wave of Reformation music.

In his organ music, Sweelinck responded not only to the tunes of the Genevan Psalter but also to Lutheran chorales, as well as to the latest fashionable Italian dances. This raises the question of composers' beliefs and allegiances, and how they navigated at times treacherous confessional waters of a turbulent age. Bearing in mind that Catholic singers were so often associated with the church, one must recognise the distinction between private belief and professional duty; however devout they may have been, a career in the church was just that: a career. For every Byrd or Victoria, whose deep religious commitment was



The first edition of the first Protestant hymnbook by Luther and Johann Walter

known, one can cite a dozen composers whose beliefs were unclear, even ambiguous, and whose professional stance was essentially pragmatic – even Palestrina in his way, and Lassus yet more so. Besides, Byrd's settings of English liturgical music also speak to his pragmatism, since one could hardly accuse him of sitting on the fence, confessionally speaking. But as his protectors included the queen, he was seldom in real danger (if ever) of dying a martyr, as his French contemporary Goudimel had done. The English situation is particularly interesting because the changes in officially sanctioned religion (gradual under Henry and Elizabeth, and dramatic under Edward and Mary) resulted in more-or-less continuous upheaval until Elizabeth was securely established on the throne. Tallis is as interesting a case study as Byrd, since he was a generation older and was active throughout the entire period, from the dissolution of the monasteries onwards. In some cases we

can date pieces with far more certainty than usual: the only instance in Tallis's case is the famous *Missa Puer natus est*, which must have been written early in Mary's reign, but pieces by other composers can be similarly located. In any case, one has to marvel at Tallis's versatility, setting *Missa Puer natus* (let alone *Spem in alium*) alongside the wonderfully simple settings of Archbishop Parker's Psalter.

From the point of view of composers' attitudes, the years immediately following 1517 are fascinating. The immediate reactions to Luther before the official condemnation of his ideas a decade or so later were surprisingly varied. Before the use of the vernacular within worship became peculiarly associated with the Reformed

ideas, interest in it extended to the highest levels, including (as mentioned earlier) the arch-Catholic Habsburg and Valois courts. Thomas Stoltzer declared that his setting of *Erzürne dich nicht* was motivated not just by royal request but by his admiration for the beauty of the words; but as these comments were addressed to a prospective Lutheran employer, it may be unwise to take them entirely at face value. Someone who knew him reported that though he may have had Protestant sympathies, he was also very prone to changing his mind ... Many other composers would have had to keep their private feelings to themselves as they looked to change employers, and others had to seek new patrons when the prevailing political



Vox Luminis recording 'Luther and the Music of the Reformation' for Ricercar - an Editor's Choice in the October issue, praised in our review for its 'hair-raising intensity'

winds forced a more rigid observance of confessional practice. By Bach's time, Lutheran cantors were no longer employed by nobles but by town councils, an altogether different dynamic; then again, Bach's relations with Leipzig town council were not always straightforward.

THE CATHOLIC RESPONSE

No discussion would be complete that did not consider the Catholic reaction. It took the Church a quarter-century to begin to formulate clear responses to the challenges laid down by the Reformation, and by the time the Council of Trent (1542–63) held its closing sessions, nearly 50 years had elapsed since Luther's first public declarations. As regards music, the Council's informal recommendations implicitly addressed some of the reformers' concerns: sacred music should no longer be based on secular or 'impure' songs, and composers should take care that words be intelligible. The story that a performance of Palestrina's *Missa Papae Marcelli* stayed the hands of those churchmen who would have abolished polyphony altogether is now regarded as myth, yet the composer's style showed how such aims could be met. But in another respect, this work represents a near-defiant negation of the Reformation. The Protestant attitude to the arts and music in worship was geared to the congregation's conscious participation, allowing neither intermediaries nor distraction; by contrast, the art and music of the Counter-Reformation sought to transport onlookers into a state of rapt contemplation of Divine majesty (and not incidentally the splendour of its earthly representatives). Expressively direct though it certainly is, *Missa Papae Marcelli* is equally imposing, even monumental. Half a century on from it, the convoluted lines of Monteverdi's sacred music, Bernini's sculptures and Borromini's architecture upped the ante in this respect, the emphasis on sensory overload as a means to ecstatic experience (as opposed to rational engagement) standing as a reaffirmation of a profound difference of approach. It was only a matter of time before these new aesthetic ideals attracted the interest of artists and musicians in Protestant lands. The music of Schütz neatly synthesises

Luther's emphasis on the Word and the musical aesthetic of Italian composers, notably Gabrieli and Monteverdi, to whom also the primacy of the word (albeit in lower-case) was of central importance. No doubt Luther would have approved. **G**

RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS

Music of the Reformation across four discs



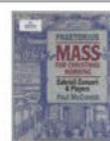
Thomas Stoltzer
Psalm Motets
Josquin Capella /
Meinholt Brüser
MDG 605 1394-2

A very early polyphonic response to Luther's translation of the Psalms into German, this fine recording introduces a little-known but immensely gifted composer, Thomas Stoltzer, who died too young to fulfil his considerable potential.



'Psaumes et Chansons de la Réforme'
Ensemble Clément Janequin /
Dominique Visse
Harmonia Mundi HMC 901672 (7/00)

Why should the devil have the best tunes? In this typically spirited performance conducted by Dominique Visse, the adaptation of well-known secular French songs to spiritual ends is rendered with the Janequins' usual verve.



Praetorius
Mass for
Christmas Morning
Gabrieli Consort
& Players /
Paul McCreesh
Archiv 439 250-2 (12/94)

This superlative disc recreates a Lutheran yuletide celebration under the auspices of Michael Praetorius. There's something for everyone, but the congregation's lusty singing (actually the Gabrieli Choir) is entirely believable.



'Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott: Luther and the Music of the Reformation'
Bart Jacobs *org*
Vox Luminis / Lionel Meunier
Ricercar RIC376 (10/17)

Perhaps the most purposeful of recent Reformation-inspired programmes, the performances are on a par with the ensemble at its best, and much of the music is either new to the catalogue or sounds that way.



(L-R) Countertenors Patrick Dunachie & Timothy Wayne-Wright; tenor Julian Gregory; baritones Christopher Bruerton & Christopher Gabbitas; bass Jonathan Howard

VOICES OF GOLD

Their line-up may have changed since they formed 50 years ago, but the distinctive sound of The King's Singers – in repertoire still as diverse as ever – remains the same, says **Jeremy Nicholas**

Seen from the stalls, they are six young(ish), well-groomed, perfectly mannered, superbly drilled, extremely accomplished male vocalists. On the left are two countertenors; the three in the middle are a tenor and two baritones; the one on the end is a bass. None of them individually is a celebrity. Each one of them could walk down any street in the world and not be recognised. Few people, with the exception of family, friends and hardcore fans, could tell you their names. But 'The King's Singers'? That's an entirely different matter. Their name and sound are instantly recognisable, they are a global musical marketing brand, and arguably the most successful vocal ensemble on the planet.

The anonymity of being a member of an orchestra is taken as read. The same is true of a string quartet. But a small vocal group is different. It takes a certain sort of singer with a certain sort of personality to surrender the performer's ego for the sake of the collegial whole. Christopher Gabbitas (baritone, and the longest-serving member of the current line-up, having joined in 2004) recognises the dilemma. 'It's a difficult one for singers in particular because our voices are our instruments. They define who we are as musicians. The people who have joined over the years gravitate towards the group – and the group picks *them* – because they are the type of singer who can not only cope with that subsuming of ego but welcomes it. Speaking from my personal experience, having been singing in the group for

a while, I love *not* being heard. It's really nice just to sit in the texture. And I think that's the essence of who we are.'

All six began singing in church choirs when they were very young. All save one are erstwhile university choral scholars. They still divide their year into three terms. I meet up with them after their six-week summer break on the first day of Michaelmas term. The next 12-plus months are going to be busy for them – even busier than normal (normal is between 120 and 130 concerts a year) – for this year, the 2017-18 season, is The King's Singers' Golden Jubilee. Anniversary activities include a year-long world tour, which begins at St John's, Smith Square, in January, as well as the release of 'Gold' – a new, 60-track recording across three themed albums – alongside an official book celebrating five decades of music-making (available either separately or together as part of a Special Edition box-set).

The King's Singers were established in May 1968, formed by six newly graduated choral scholars from King's College, Cambridge, and it was the late Sir Neville Marriner who was instrumental in securing their early gigs. After a few concerts earned on his recommendation, he hired them for the then-recently opened Queen Elizabeth Hall; the occasion was a concert on May 1, 1968, with the fledgling Academy of St Martin in the Fields. 'We had a great review from Stephen Walsh in *The Times*', founder member Brian Kay tells me, 'and

that led to many bookings from music clubs. We all had other professional music jobs, so it wasn't easy for the six of us to get together. Then in 1972, thanks to Neville dropping our name, we were offered three months – 35 concerts – in Australia and New Zealand. That was when we decided to give it a go.'

They agreed to give themselves two-and-a-half years – if it lasted that long – after which they'd call it a day.

The original six members have long since left the group (all amicably, it seems) and gone their separate and successful ways. Kay, for instance, left fully 35 years ago, having sung over 2000 concerts with the group, and has since worked as a conductor and broadcaster. There have been 24 members since 1968. The average length of stay is 12 years. The longest has been 26 years (countertenor David Hurley), closely followed by founder-member baritone Simon Carrington (1968–93). The shortest has been five. The average duration of a line-up with the same six people is a mere two-and-a-half years but then some line-ups have lasted for five, one for nine and another for 10 years. Last January, the current group hosted a dinner for all King's Singers, past and present. Brian Kay ruefully reminded the latest recruit, Patrick Dunachie, that when it all started Patrick's parents hadn't even been born.

How does one become a King's Singer? Clearly it is not just a question of having the right voice, or even, in addition, possessing great sightreading skills and a good memory, though these are *sine qua non*. Dunachie, one of the two countertenors, joined in September 2016: 'There is a relatively small circle of people who are possible candidates for this job. It's not really practical to put out a job description online because you'd get an unmanageably large number of applications. Instead, people are invited to audition as the result of calling various conductors, fixers, music directors and other singers in the London, Oxford and Cambridge areas to see if there is anyone who might be suitable for the job. A shortlist is drawn up. You are then contacted by someone in the group.'

There are two or three rounds of auditions. The first is quite short – a case of learning a few King's Singers pieces and stepping into the place you'd be filling. In Dunachie's case, he succeeded David Hurley. It was the first time anyone had sung those parts, other than Hurley, for 25 years. 'My colleagues tell me that it's always very clear early on who the people might be who can do the job.'

From the very start, The King's Singers chose to



Recording 'Gold' in Oxford (in the same line-up as the picture on the page opposite)

present mixed programmes. 'Combining the serious stuff we'd do in chapel with some of the things we'd do for The Footlights went down well,' recalls Kay, who presented the group at the Lord's Taverners a few years back. 'They were a knockout,' he recalls like a proud father, 'and when they got into the close-harmony stuff they were light years ahead of what we ever achieved.'

A major task for a new member is, obviously, learning

the repertoire. There is a lot of it. An awful lot. And it is sung in as many languages as there are countries the group has visited. Timothy Wayne-Wright (the other countertenor, who joined in 2009) agrees that at first it is daunting. 'But you are surrounded by five colleagues who know the repertoire backwards. They help you through it. When I first joined, Philip Lawson [baritone, 1994–2012] was in charge of the library, which has anything between 3500 and 4000 scores. He would send me these folders – I was offered the job in 2008 – and I sat through the whole of that summer break wading through all these different languages.'

On a recent recording called 'Postcards' the group sang in 21 of them.

What has remained constant is the sound. 'It's bound to be the same,' Kay avers, 'first because of the distribution of voices. There were plenty of

other male voice groups around when we started but none with countertenors. The other thing was the background of King's; David Willcocks, the Director of Music at that time, instilled in us the importance of blend and balance and clarity of diction and all those other slightly old-fashioned things, and they have stood the test of time. The other thing that made it work is that we were the only group that was actually full-time. Other people went off to sing in other groups and when they came back they'd have to work on re-establishing the sound. Well, we never had that. It was just like turning on a tap.'

'And an extra ingredient when we started was that we were all great buddies. We'd come out of the choir stalls and straight into The Eagle pub in Cambridge – the chemistry

between us was already formed. We had the technique, so once we'd chosen the right name, and established the King's sound and the distribution of voices – then there were things we could do.'

So how would the present members describe The King's Singers' sound? 'It's supposed to be like stepping into a warm bath,' says New Zealander Christopher Bruerton (baritone, joined 2012). 'One of the things



Baritone Christopher Bruerton puts aspiring young singers through their paces



In Johannesburg, South Africa (left) and Romania (centre & right) – touring is a huge part of what The King's Singers do, and their Golden Jubilee year is no exception

which makes it – I hope – special is the diversity of sound pictures that we create. There are certain groups that are known for having a strident sound, others that have a very bland sound. We are able to create everything on that spectrum and one of the exciting things is that when we are doing the really super-blended, quite breathy, *senza vibrato* singing, I would say that this sound has been continuous over 50 years.'

The longevity of The King's Singers is one thing, but what sets them apart from any other *a cappella* group is the sheer range of their repertoire. It is – and always has been – all-embracing. Madrigals sit side by side with the songs of the Comedian Harmonists, the Great American Songbook with Christmas carols, Medieval French chansons

with Eric Whitacre and John Rutter, The Beatles with Gesualdo's *Tenebrae Responsories*. A lot of other groups do everything from memory. The King's Singers use music stands for the more sacred repertoire and then remove them for their close-harmony set (towards the end of the concert). It's all part of their stagecraft.

For the sextet, it's a life of international repertoire and travel. What most of us would think of as a crazy schedule is considered by these singers as 'a really simple month'. Shortly after our interview, the group was travelling to Riga, then somewhere in Spain, then to Ilkley and Stoke-by-Nayland in the space of a few days. 'You get used to it,' Jonathan Howard (bass, joined 2010) reassures me. 'Most of the travel we do is by plane. It's quite normal for us, especially in America, to do five concerts in five days with a plane journey on each day – and with a workshop before the concert. It's simply a case of practice and good planning.'

It's not even as though they all live close to one another: four live in London (Richmond, Shoreditch, and two in Clapham), one in East Sussex and one in Kennington (south of Oxford). Old-hand Gabbitas confirms: 'It's a little bit of every man for himself. Don't forget this is a massive life-changing experience because this is unlike any job you have ever done or will ever do again. Very quickly you learn not to leave it until the last minute to get to the airport. You will have a contingency plan, whether that's travelling by bus, train or car. You think logically and financially about every decision you make. It's all for the good of the group.'

Everything seems so easy, collegial, calm and ordered; the baton is handed down from one generation to the next without a ripple on the surface. As Gabbitas says, 'The group has been going for so long now that all the teething problems of the original six members have been ironed out. So we are lucky. It just works.' Each member is assigned a different role in the administration of the group: Wayne-Wright handles the library and archive (updated after every single concert) and carries published books to sell when the concerts finish;

Dunachie is in charge of social media platforms and online digital content; Julian Gregory (tenor, joined September 2014) oversees finance, (foreign language) announcements and programme notes; Bruerton organises education projects, workshops and

summer schools, and lugs CDs around (at least 100 per concert); Gabbitas does day-to-day logistics, scheduling and travel ('ensuring we're in the best possible state for whatever we are doing'), recording projects, publications, and legal stuff (he trained as a lawyer before taking up this line of work); and Howard is 'the creative side, thinking up new projects and ideas now and for the years to come, and working with publicists'.

For their anniversary, The King's Singers have commissioned a series of new works, including five 'proper' choral commissions, one by former member Bob Chilcott, another by John Rutter who has written a great deal for the group over the years. There are also several new close-harmony arrangements making their first appearance throughout the Golden Jubilee.

My next question prompts a collective guffaw. Where is The King's Singers' music library? Explains Wayne-Wright: 'I took over the library from Philip Lawson when Chris Bruerton joined in 2012. I had all the physical scores in my tiny little flat in Clapham. They filled up one entire room and I would go round at the beginning of each term picking out the music and putting it in peoples' folders. Then the age of the iPad Pro came upon us. We had always wanted to have the library digitised but the normal-sized iPad was too small to read a score from. When the iPad Pro came out we leapt at the chance.' They commissioned a company called AMS – Archive Management Systems – to undertake the task. 'Believe it or not, ours was a tiny, tiny project for them. They came to my house and picked up all 226 box files full of music and digitised it. As the weeks went on, I would get PDFs sent to me and I would

fling them out to these guys. So now we carry all of our music around on our iPads and our cases are free to hold things other than music. At the start of each term, I just send the guys the PDFs for that term.'

What about the issue of page-turning? Pianists are able to use a foot pedal to do this, but here, each member now has his own bluetooth page-turner. 'We want to eliminate any distraction,' explains Wayne-Wright. 'And whereas we might have been in some beautiful basilica and you'd hear the swish of the page turns, now there is silence and the atmosphere we can create is not disturbed. It's all thought through.'

I can't help but wonder how the money works. Dividing up royalties, CD and sheet-music sales – when some of those sales will derive from the work of people no longer in the group – must surely be tricky? Julian Gregory fields this one. 'Depending on how long you've been with the group, obviously you'll have been on fewer, or more, CDs than others, so the royalty distribution reflects that. When someone leaves, then we work out an individual plan for them.'

This leads to the question that is most commonly asked of The King's Singers by members of the public after a concert: What happens if one of you is ill? 'The answer', says Jonathan Howard, 'is that, while in the past, if one of us was taken ill, we would have had to scrabble around getting scans and photocopies sent, now we have access to five-part or four-part music and put together a programme suitable for the night.'

But there are, they all concur, two other questions that are frequently asked by audience members, questions that are, as they say, guaranteed to 'rile while you smile': 'Is this your full-time job?' and 'What else do you do?' If only they knew. **G**

► To read Gramophone's review of the triple album 'Gold' turn to page 104

THE KING'S SINGERS RECOMMEND...

The current members choose their favourite albums



Patrick Dunachie
Countertenor
'The King's Singers' Christmas'

The King's Singers
Signum **£** SIGCD502 (1/04)
A traditional Christmas Eve service recorded in 2003 at St Michael's Church, Highgate. *Gramophone* reviewer Malcolm Riley praised the group's 'celebrated, honeyed and perfectly balanced blend'.



Timothy Wayne-Wright
Countertenor and **Christopher Bruerton** Baritone
'Get Happy!'

The King's Singers
George Shearing **pf** Neil Swainson **db**
John Harle **sax**
EMI **£** 754 1902
Songs by Gershwin, Mercer and Arlen, plus 'Lullaby of Birdland' by George Shearing.



Julian Gregory
Tenor
'Watching the White Wheat'
The King's Singers

Marcia Crayford **vn**
Christopher van Kampen **vc**
Bill Jackman **cl, picc** Skaila Kanga **hp**
EMI **£** **£** 747 5062
Evocative songs of the British Isles.



Christopher Gabbitas Baritone
'Landscape & Time'
The King's Singers
Andrew Swaights **treb**

Signum **£** SIGCD090 (3/07)
Themed music by Křek, Kodály, Peter Maxwell Davies and others.



Jonathan Howard
Bass
'Spirit Voices'
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THE TROJANS RETURN TO FRANCE

James Jolly reports from Strasbourg where John Nelson and a star-studded cast, headed by Joyce DiDonato, Michael Spyres and Marie-Nicole Lemieux, have recorded Berlioz's epic opera

With *Ring* cycles appearing with the frequency of London buses, *Tristans* and *Parsifals* by the handful, and even pretty regular performances of Richard Strauss's *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, there's one grand opera by one of music's greats that's still an event: Hector Berlioz's *Les Troyens*. Completed in 1858, it took five years for a note of the music to

be heard and then only the opera's second part (Acts 3-5, 'Les Troyens à Carthage') was given. It wasn't until 1890, 21 years after Berlioz's death, that the entire five-act work was performed complete in Paris. The opera was subsequently only given in its two parts, and when it returned to the French capital in 1961, under the baton of Georges Prêtre, it was in a hugely truncated version. And even those performances



mounted for the opening of the new Paris opera house at the Bastille in 1990 were cut and the opera again given in two parts.

It seems that we Brits are the most loyal champions of *Les Troyens* – it was a favourite of Sir Thomas Beecham, who gave a concert performance in 1947 which was broadcast by the BBC. The first staged production in the UK, and probably closer than any before to the composer's intentions (except that it was sung in English), was given at Covent Garden under Rafael Kubelík in 1957 (a recording is now available on Testament). The first of only two studio recordings was made in London for Philips with one of the great Berliozians, Sir Colin Davis, in charge (Davis would record the work again in concert for LSO Live, a set which won a *Gramophone* Award in 2002). Charles Dutoit conducted the opera's second studio set for Decca, and various DVD versions have been released under the batons of James Levine, Sir John Eliot Gardiner (another *Gramophone* Award winner, in 2005), Sylvain Cambreling and Sir Antonio Pappano.

And now the opera returns to France, more or less complete, performed and recorded in concert, all five acts done in a single span, and in the charge of a conductor, John Nelson, who probably knows this score better than anyone else, past or present, as he has presided over eight productions during his long career.

Nelson, a conductor best known in the UK for his many recordings for Erato and Virgin Classics, has been a loyal Berlioz conductor for many years. *Les Troyens*, though, occupies a very special place in his musical life. 'My career started with this piece. I had a dear friend, the impresario Matthew Epstein, and he was the one who introduced me to the composer. Before that I had tended to concentrate on German music – mostly Bach and Handel – and he told me I needed to do something to get my name out there. "Go to the library", he said, "and get out the new Bärenreiter score of *The Trojans*." I didn't know it existed but it just swept me away. And I had the audacity to think that I could do it at 30 years of age, so I conducted a concert performance – just like this – at Carnegie Hall and it's what launched my career. And I have been associated with the composer ever since.'

For Nelson, Berlioz's music, and particularly this vast score, has a special magic. 'I think it's a white fire – it is such an incredibly concentrated energy. It's not Wagner, it's something much more classical and yet, within it, there is this incredible fire that one doesn't find in any other French composer. It's one of the reasons that French people don't really understand Berlioz. He was not the usual Frenchman, and we're still being shocked by this man.'

So far in *Les Troyens*' performance and recording history, the orchestras have tended to be British or American. For this event though, recorded for Erato and released on November 24, Nelson conducted the Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg. What does a French ensemble bring? Nelson, who has worked often with the Strasbourg orchestra, is quite clear. 'I just came from Frankfurt where I did a number of performances with a really good German orchestra, but it was heavy. Here, you're lifted – there's a lightness, a freshness, that's quintessentially French. Having the two orchestras back to back was extraordinary – I don't think I've ever encountered such a difference, and such completely different approaches. And this French orchestra, being on the banks of the Rhine, can play German music as well – after all, they're Alsatian. They have both qualities when needed. For me they were the ideal orchestra for the piece.'

Les Troyens runs for nearly five hours, but the 75-year-old Nelson's only concession to its physical demands, in the two concerts, is to conduct the last couple of acts without his shoes. 'At the end of the performance I'm so exhilarated that I don't feel for a moment tired, although give me half an hour and I'm dead! But the excitement of the music keeps me alive for those five hours. At the end of the evening I feel I could do it all over again. The music is so incredibly inspiring that you don't have time to rest your mind or your body.'

The recording also fulfils a long-held ambition by Erato's President, and surely the most visionary classical A&R man of our day, Alain Lanceron.

When we sit down after the second concert in Strasbourg, he is positively glowing with pride – and relief. 'It's something I've wanted to do for years. There were several attempts which collapsed because dreams often don't make it to reality. But when John told me he'd like to do it I jumped. For Erato, John has done *Béatrice et Benedict* and then with Virgin he did the *Te Deum* with Roberto Alagna, *Benvenuto Cellini* with a cast that included Joyce DiDonato, and *Les nuits d'été* with David Daniels. For years, *Les Troyens* was considered impossible. Even 20 years ago, few opera companies would do it in one evening. It was usually done in two parts because it was supposed to be too long, although it's not as long as *Parsifal* or *Götterdämmerung*. But *Les Troyens* is difficult to cast.'

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Yet, if one man in the classical music business can cast it with style – and from his artist roster – it's Lanceron, and it's quite remarkable how many of the key roles have been filled by artists who regularly record for his label ('my "Walter Legge" cast', he says jokingly): Joyce DiDonato (Didon), Marie-Nicole Lemieux (Cassandra), Marianne Crebassa (Ascagne) and Stanislas de Barbeyrac (Hylas and Hélénus) are all exclusive Erato artists, and around them Lanceron has assembled a predominantly Francophone cast with singers like Stéphane Degout (Chorébe), Philippe Sly (Panthée), Hanna Hipp (Anna) and Cyrille Dubois (Iopas) – not to mention the US 'French tenor' of the moment, Michael Spyres, as Énée.

Lanceron speaks with palpable passion not just about the project, but about the opera too. 'What makes *Les Troyens* incredible is that the theatre is inside the music and it's regenerating all the time. Darkness turns to light and then back to darkness. And there are so many really strong characters – every 15 minutes you encounter a new character and that helps keep the piece fresh. It keeps lifting it to a higher level and, with such a cast as great as this, it jumps from climax to climax.'

The decision to record the work under John Nelson's baton led first to the Strasbourg orchestra and then to the casting. Joyce was our obvious choice even though she has not done it on stage yet (she will sing it in Vienna next year and I'm sure will do it often because it's a role that's absolutely perfect for her). She's an exclusive artist, she's wonderful with Berlioz, so it was obvious. After Joyce came the rest. There were maybe three possibilities at the top level. And after securing Joyce, John told me "I want a darker voice for Cassandra than for Dido".'

The only one of the three North American principals who had any kind of 'form' with *Les Troyens* is the Québécoise contralto Marie-Nicole Lemieux, a singer of exuberance and constant laughter who is guaranteed to raise the spirits of any opera company she adorns. DiDonato sums it up with typical generosity: 'Marie-Nicole is the sort of person who comes in and brings everything that she is – a gorgeous voice, a gorgeous personality, and a wonderful artistry that's real and alive. She motivates and inspires everyone around her. That's the kind of artist that we all feed off.' Lemieux's encounter with *Les Troyens* came right at the start of her career. 'I was singing a concert in Quebec City and a member of the audience came up to me at the end and said, "One day you will be great Cassandra", and I just stared at him. Of course, I knew Berlioz from *Les nuits d'été* but I didn't know the opera. So I went off to the library, read about it and looked at the score – and particularly the role of Cassandra – and my first thoughts were, "Wow, this character's crazy! But for me? A



The conductor and Berlioz specialist John Nelson, and Marie-Nicole Lemieux, who sings Cassandra

contralto?" I couldn't imagine it. Then in 2006 I had the opportunity to sing Anna in *Les Troyens* with the wonderful Michel Plasson conducting – and he taught me so much about how to sing the French music and how to pronounce the words and play with the consonants. He really taught me a lot about the clarity of the words, about how to enjoy the language.'

Jump forward 10 years: Alain Lanceron was casting his *Troyens* and he met up with Lemieux. 'When I did Anna', she recalls, 'I had the opportunity to listen to the entire opera and my first reaction was to think that Didon would be safer for me, but that perhaps one day I might think about Cassandra. But I was really afraid of the dramatic charge of the character. It demands a lot, and as I have a natural dramatic sense – I'm really intense by nature – I was a little afraid for myself. I knew that if I took it on I would do it 150 per cent. At the same time, I was really charmed by the sensuality of Didon, this melancholy that she has, the tenderness, the beautiful lines. But life goes on, and when Alain talked to me about making a recording of *Les Troyens*, he initially said, "Do you want to sing Anna?" and I said, "OK". But there was a friend with us and he said, "I don't know why you don't ask her to sing Cassandra", and Alain looked at me and

said, "Would you?", and I looked at them and said, "Are you crazy?". I called my teacher and told him and he said, "Marie-Nicole, now I think you can sing what you want! Go for it. If you don't take risks ..." So, I bought the score and worked

on the first aria and I finally realised that I felt good with it. I called Alain and I said, "OK, let's do it!" But then I thought I would die because I was so scared of this crazy music and I was worried about what might happen. It's demanding. It's huge.

A vast orchestra – over 300 people on stage. But I did it and I must say I'm proud! And in true Lemieux style, she follows her comments with a great peal of laughter.

The characters of Dido and Aeneas on this new recording are both American and both new to the opera. For DiDonato, the offer to be involved, she believes, couldn't have come at a better moment. 'I'd spent time with *La damnation* and with Massenet's *Werther* and I thought this French repertoire fits me well, so it seemed like a good time to meet Didon. John told me recently that when we did *Benvenuto Cellini* about 10 years ago, he'd said, "She will be my Didon when I do *The Trojans*". I certainly didn't see that on the radar screen back then, but when they offered it to me I thought, "This is a good moment".

The character of Didon, serene but also impetuous, fits DiDonato like a glove and, vocally, it clearly works. 'I wouldn't know how to begin to describe how much I like the way Berlioz

writes for the voice. He loved and lavished all of his artistic creativity on the mezzo. And this is deeply connected to what I think is the core of the character. When I enter her world – aside from how Berlioz fits the voice in terms of *passaggio* and range – the way he goes into the voice and lets the middle expand makes it clear that he loved this *Fach*. I can approach this beautiful vocal writing with a real mission to flesh out the character in three dimensions. And it is so rewarding to sing. I don't feel like I'm in an opera, I feel that this is the only way this character can come to life, as Berlioz created her.'

By coincidence, these two performances of *Les Troyens* fell shortly after one of DiDonato's periods of touring her previous album, the *Gramophone* Award-winning 'In War and Peace', with Purcell's take on Dido a key moment. 'I'll tell you a quick story that connects the two in a very unexpected way,' she confides. 'We've talked before about Sing-Sing [the maximum-security gaol in upstate New York] where I've worked with the prisoners. I brought Dido's Lament to them and we were workshopping a little bit by having them improvise on the bass line. They were singing it and I said, "Guys, you're sounding great but don't forget ..." – and I explained the situation, and said that Dido here is this tragic figure, getting ready to go to her death – and Joseph Wilson, who wrote an essay for the "In War and Peace" booklet, raised his hand and said, "If I may: it's true that on that downward chromatic passage you feel the tragedy, but by the time it's resolved you can tell that she knows she's going to her glory." And I just about toppled over because I thought, if only Purcell could hear what we were doing and what this man, a murderer from the Bronx, had just said and his comprehension of all of that ... It rocked my world. It was this observation from this prisoner, a composer, at Sing-Sing – that Dido has this sense of defiance and glory in choosing her fate that way – that informed me when I came to Berlioz's version.'

DiDonato's Énée is Michael Spyres, a tenor who has probably sung more performances of *La damnation de Faust* than anyone else, living or dead. He has the longest role in the opera, appearing from beginning to end, and, like DiDonato feels a deep connection with Berlioz's writing for the voice. 'I honestly feel that Enée fits me better than many roles that I have taken on. I felt particularly at home with it because earlier this year I recorded an entire album [for Opera Rara] of music written specifically for the tenor Gilbert Duprez who was Berlioz's first Cellini. This role is very similar to much of the music written for Duprez. I feel the greatness lies within how Berlioz achieved a perfect symbiosis between words and vocal writing. The most difficult thing about Enée is that you must keep the extreme emotions out of the vocal technique. Yes, Berlioz wrote some



Michael Spyres as Énée and Marianne Crebassa as Ascagne (top), and mezzo Joyce DiDonato as Didon

of the most grandiose moments in all of opera history, but he also wrote some of the most tender and breathtakingly beautiful lines. The range of dynamics that Berlioz demands is really unmatched by any other composer as he goes from an intimate duet like "Nuit d'ivresse" to the heights in "Châtiments effroyable". It really seems to me that Berlioz should be called the grandfather of *verismo* vocal-writing as he changed the course of opera with this piece.'

When we talk after the second performance, Lanceron, the project's architect, stresses that, above all, these were recording sessions, not concerts that were being recorded. And it's an approach that everyone involved has found truly inspiring. Says Michael Spyres: 'Every bit of the process was exciting and, in truth, it was one of the greatest times I have ever had while rehearsing and performing. We all came together like a team, and every single time we would rehearse with the full orchestra it was absolutely magical. The most fun thing about performing this piece was to see the joy in the audience's faces because they knew that

this was something absolutely special and more than likely a once-in-a-lifetime event.' Joyce DiDonato is in agreement: 'There was very special feeling, and it was that way from day one. I would say that this is an arrival point for John to which he brought every fibre of his experience and love and passion but also an air of discovery. And everybody felt that they were part of the creative process and not just following a preordained blueprint. John had this wonderful energy of bringing Berlioz

into that room with us and it felt like we were all learning and creating at the same time. I think that's why it felt so empowering and so special to everyone involved – even to the sixth harp or the fifth trombone in the back of the orchestra. If you had removed

any one of those players it would have felt diminished somehow. Everybody felt empowered to be creating music together.' Marie-Nicole Lemieux takes over: 'It was a great experience on a human level. The atmosphere was real and there was a very special spirit. We were all pals. We loved each other and we had shared goals. We all wanted to be as good as possible for John. He has a heart that's so big – and he's so devoted to music and to Berlioz. He's been so important in my career because he taught me that you must always be passionate about what you do. I will forever be proud to have been part of this project.'

And let's leave the final word to the Nelson himself: 'It was so much better than a studio recording with all the messing around involved,' he says. 'This is 10 times more dramatic than doing it on the stage, and to record it this way is ideal. This is it! I've climbed Everest.' **•**

► Read *Gramophone*'s review of Berlioz's *Les Troyens* on Erato on page 56

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ATLANTIC DISCOVERY

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with *The Sacconi Quartet; Tim Horton, piano; and Gary Ryan, guitar*

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O Holy Night: the Choir of Merton College, Oxford, under Benjamin Nicholas, bring seasonal cheer

GLAD TIDINGS

A choral Christmas

Andrew Mellor enters the festive spirit with a selection of this year's Christmas albums, from The King's Singers, The Queen's Six and various college choirs

For those who believe the commercialisation of Christmas has gone too far, there is a ready antidote in this year's crop of seasonal releases. Many of them could have used a crash course in market research and product orientation. While the best unashamedly target a specific fan base ('Christmas music from the time of the English Civil War' – that sort of thing), the most tiresome presume that 'Christmas' in all its ambiguity is focus enough. For the second year in a row, we are reminded how elusive the truly worthwhile Christmas album really is.

That's partly because we're apparently happy, at this time of year, to dispense with the rulebook entirely. You can eat chocolate for breakfast, drink alcohol before lunch, and deem the lowest common denominator perfectly acceptable in musical terms. But let's stop and think about what that actually means. It *doesn't* necessarily mean music of low quality. It *can* mean music that wears its attributes lightly enough to attract cross-party approval and induce feelings of community – and communion – as a result. Tap that, and you have a good route to Christmas album success as an alternative to something with acute musicological focus.

Group amateur singing, of course, delivers that feeling of community in spades where professional enterprises can struggle. 'A choir is a place where people leave many aspects of their life at the door', writes Bob Chilcott in the touching sleeve note to a recording of his own Christmas music *In Winter's Arms*. 'People who live and work in all kinds of circumstances ... give their time, their energies, their resources and their goodwill to experience singing together and creating transcendent moments of shared beauty, laughter and positivity.' Christmas itself hopefully does something similar.

In truth the Chilcott recording is a mixed bag (we'll come to it later on) but the composer's words get to the heart of why making an album of carols, for example, is so tricky. Often such albums are taped in high summer and almost as often you can tell. The most heart-warming moments in the annual Nine Lessons and Carols broadcasts – even for listeners with critical ears – are usually those in which everyone sings a good, sturdy hymn-carol together. On **Lo, how a rose e'er blooming** from The Queen's Six, we encounter *Hark! the herald* and *O come, all ye faithful* – bellowing organ, descants and all – rendered by the sum vocal total of six male adults. The results are odd indeed.

Chilcott comes unstuck when attempting to crowbar the text into the straitjacket he creates for himself in 'O little town' from the same piece.

It's a shame the repertoire takes a nosedive, as there is much to admire in the choir's restrained, careful singing, despite the odd tuning wobble. Overall, this is a curious product with no choir list in the booklet or details of where it was recorded. But we do learn that having conquered the worlds of choral music, jazz and musicology, senior organ scholar Tim Muggridge is

now training to be a pilot with Virgin Atlantic. He is just the sort of pilot you'd want: steady, focused, undemonstrative and probably a wizard in the fuel economy stakes.

So back to the all-Chilcott album, **In Winter's Arms**, which comes courtesy of the family of ensembles that falls under The Choralis Foundation's umbrella. These musicians radiate all the warmth of the famous church scene from *Home Alone*, never more so than in the sixth movement of Chilcott's oratorio *Wenceslas*, 'Thank You'. That underscores Chilcott's gift as

a songwriter and an arranger of those songs, but we have two mini-oratorios here and a setting of the *Gloria* that demand rather more. Suspending stylistic arguments for the season

of goodwill, it seems to me that Chilcott isn't nearly as effective when it comes to music that needs to push a narrative along, and that's where his music can drift into the banal and the disposable.

But some of the best sacred music was written *not* to last. The Manchester-based lawyer and composer John Turner has been sending musical Christmas cards to friends for years, little ditties often written without anything as lofty as public performance (or even commercial recording) in mind. The result? Neat, undemonstrative and individual little carols (22 in all, with an instrumental canzonetta included too) that absolutely surpass their 'closed circle' origins. Highlights among Turner's **Christmas Card Carols** are the beautiful *Invocation to Sleep* and the shapely, evocative melody of *Rocking Hymn*. Throughout, the vocal quintet Intimate Voices under

Christopher Stokes, clearly recording on the hoof, sing with detail and reactivity.

So, naturally, do The King's Singers, who comfortably erase memories of last year's Christmas turkey (*Christmas Songbook*) with a recording of

Given the general air of solemnity hanging over the whole enterprise, the back cover's boast of a 'scintillating' programme suggests a publicist who's hit the Christmas sherrries early. I have some issues with the particular style of singing and its general smoothing over of texts (in works from Byrd's *Hodie Christus natus est* to Jonathan Darbourne's arrangement of *Let it snow*). But of greater concern is that the album sounds so stiff, joyless and uninvolved, even in the pop numbers.

Christmas music needs a sense of rapture and that comes as much from text as from the notes themselves, if not even more so. Benjamin Nicholas has trained his choir at Merton College, Oxford, very well indeed. But in **O Holy Night: A Merton Christmas** we are, in some ways, up against the same problem: a few too many good manners in the songs (as in, the stuff by John Rutter) and a 'demonstration mode' in the hymn-carols (same two as from The Queen's Six) that freezes the listener-participant out.

The disc was recorded in Merton's chapel, which makes me wonder where the Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra was placed. In Adolph Adam's *O Holy Night*, the strings sound like they're in another room and pretty scrawny at that. Not even Rutter's arrangement of Adam's carol can expel the memory of Darius Battiwalla's, as heard on 2016's best Christmas disc, the Hallé's *A Christmas Celebration*. *A Merton Christmas* is at its best in the uncluttered purity of Poston's *Jesus Christ the Apple Tree* and Pearsall's arrangement of *In dulci jubilo*, both of which prove the extent to which this choir is continuing to evolve its core sound.

Over at Exeter College, Oxford, the chapel choir is student-led but impressively drilled nonetheless. **On Christmas Night** sets out to capture the 'varied styles' of music for Christmas, but we could excusably interpret it as a journey from the 'good' to the 'bad'. We begin with Pärt and Vaughan Williams, traverse Howells and Rütti, collapse into Rutter and Will Todd and end with a series of pieces by Bob Chilcott that lower the bar even further. All the warmth and wonder of a carol like *Once in Royal David's City* comes from its harmonic and rhythmic familiarity as much as from its tune; hearing that tune woven into an inefficient context – as in Chilcott's 'This is the truth' from his oratorio *On Christmas Night* in which it is mashed up with that other familiar tune – is plain frustrating. Even the first-class songwriter that is



Joyous musicianship: the Ebor Singers present an exploratory offering

A Finnish Christmas is a sturdy Lutheran affair with plenteous choral treats from the Helsinki Chamber Choir



Devotional authenticity: the Helsinki Chamber Choir capture the essence of a Finnish Christmas

a concert given in the Chapel of King's College, Cambridge, two years ago. In fact, the Singers literally tell you when to slide **Christmas Presence** (geddit?) into your hi-fi: on Christmas morning itself. And I'll happily oblige, because this particular journey from Lassus and Praetorius to – you guessed it – Bob Chilcott (via Poulenc, Howells, and Christmas folk songs from Spain and America) absolutely draws you in and convinces with its unusual trajectory.

That might be because the group has thought so seriously about how to make its distinctive sound work for each piece while also allowing that sound to pervade the programme. So we have the polyphony of Byrd's *Beata viscera Maria virginis* delivered with a sort of smooth sensuality, and the Take-Five rhythms of Geoffrey Keating's *God rest you merry gentlemen* sung with some acknowledgement that Brubeck was doing strange and important things in the piece it clearly pays homage to. The skill deployed in Mel Tormé's *Christmas Song* bypasses that feeling of repression (on many levels) that male church singers doing 'light' repertoire so often leave as a residue.

Nobody, of course, does repression quite like the Finns. But in the case of **Riemuitkaamme! A Finnish Christmas** that delivers another album whose even keel pays dividends. This is a sturdy Lutheran affair strewn with Bach and Buxtehude from organist Jan Lehtola and with plenteous choral treats from the former Finnish Radio Choir (now Helsinki Chamber Choir). Thankfully, none are congregational carols with the congregation missing. Included are unfamiliar gems by Jean Sibelius, Leevi Madetoja and Taneli Kuusisto and that rare thing: an aesthetically successful new carol by the Canadian-Finn Matthew Whittall, the cheeky *Aattoilta* ('Christmas Eve'). So much of the music is not only seasonal but also interesting and well written (a personal highlight would be Arvi Karvonen's *Pastorale* for organ solo). And despite the professional sound of the choir, there is a sense of devotional authenticity here. Admittedly, some of it might stem from the fact that the organ at St Paul's Church in Helsinki needs a tune.

Speaking of authenticity, Belinda Sykes and her group Jogleresa point to all the sources for their album **Sing We Yule**, which proceeds to take notions of correctness with a refreshing pinch of salt. There are some expert musicians involved in this folk-medieval jamboree – when the voice of Emma Kirkby launches into *Blow, blow thou winter wind* it is immediately unmistakable – but it's often when one musician is performing alone that the disc is most moving. In those instances, as in the traditional Irish song *Don Oíche ud im Beithil* sung so beautifully by Úna Palliser, we really hear the fabric of text and music intertwining in their rawest form. That, and they bypass the dry, arid studio sound that is so unpleasant in the larger ensemble pieces.



The Choralis Foundation offer a disc of seasonal music by Bob Chilcott

Still, I appreciated the focus and lack of duplication in Jogleresa disc as much as I did in the best of the bunch, which is the very celebration of Christmas in the time of the English Civil War I referred to at the start. **A Cavalier Christmas** from The Ebor Singers and the Chelys Consort of Viols combines fascinating repertoire with joyous, bustling musicianship that preserves agility despite the fact that the ensemble (around 25 singers) is bigger than we might expect in this repertoire.

The real attraction for *Gramophone* readers will be that repertoire. A handful of composers were new to me (Alessandro Grandi, Richard Dering, Martin Peerson) but all trade in the emotional tenderness that was infiltrating sacred music during and surrounding the reign of Charles I. Many of the young singers are afforded solos ('tis the season of goodwill) while the distinct blend and bounce of the viol consort sets their stand-alone tracks off wonderfully. Among those, I'd point to John Jenkins's *Pavan and Galliard on the Newark Siege*. But for the joy of Christmas from the full forces, I'd have to point to George Jeffreys's *Busy time this day* and William Byrd's carol for New Year, *O God that guides the cheerful sun*. Focused? Absolutely. Perfect? Not quite. Just the way it should be. **G**

THE CHRISTMAS LIST

Your guide to the festive season's recordings



Lo, how a rose e'er blooming

The Queen's Six

Resonus (F) RES10204



O Holy Night: A Merton Christmas

Choir of Merton College Oxford, Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra / Benjamin Nicholas

Delphian (F) DCD34192



On Christmas Night

Exeter College Chapel Choir / Tim Muggeridge

Oxrecs Digital (F) OXCD135



In Winter's Arms: Seasonal Music by Bob Chilcott

Choralis / Gretchen Kuhrmann

Signum (F) SIGCD512



John Turner: Christmas Card Carols

Intimate Voices / Christopher Stokes

Divine Art (F) DDA25161



Christmas Presence

The King's Singers

Signum (F) SIGCD497



Riemuitkaamme! A Finnish Christmas

Jan Lehtola org

Helsinki Chamber Choir /

Nils Schreckendiek

BIS (F) BIS2322



Sing We Yule

Jogleresa / Belinda Sykes

Jogleresa (F) JOGO007



A Cavalier Christmas

The Ebor Singers; Chelys Consort of

Viols / Paul Gameson

Resonus (F) RES10202



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Critics' Choice 2017

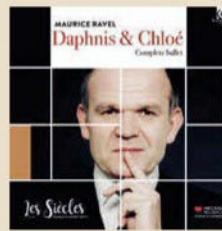
Our critics each choose a favourite recording from the past 12 months. If you're after the perfect gift guide for Christmas, look no further!

Andrew Achenbach

Ravel Daphnis et Chloé
Ensemble Aedes; Les Siècles /
François-Xavier Roth

Harmonia Mundi **F** HMM 90 5280 (6/17)
I adored this thrillingly cogent yet intoxicatingly atmospheric rendering of Ravel's sublime ballet with a superbly agile period-instrument orchestra. In terms of refreshingly distinctive

timbre and subtly quarried detail it's a feast for the ears; indeed, the whole venture distils all the heady excitement of a genuine theatrical event.



Tim Ashley

'Secrets'
Marianne Crebassa *mez* **Fazil Say** *pf*
Erato **F** 9029 57689-7 (12/17)



Park 3 forms a provocative appendix. It includes some intense Duparc, an ultra-sensual *Chansons de Bilitis*, and the best performance of Fauré's *Mirages* that I know.

Mike Ashman

Walton Symphonies Nos 1 & 2
Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra /
Kirill Karabits

Onyx **F** ONYX4168 (12/17)



Orchestral surprises on disc have been coming out of Bournemouth since the days of Dan Godfrey. Now Kirill Karabits's new Walton coupling combines much of the bite of the famous old Previn/LSO disc with a sound world that leans relevantly to Shostakovich and Prokofiev.

Nalen Anthoni

Haydn The Seasons (sung in English)
Gabrieli Consort & Players / Paul McCreesh
Signum **M ②** SIGCD480 (5/17)

'Haydn the Inaccessible' averred Donald Tovey. To which composer Robin Holloway adds 'Haydn the Accessible', 'Haydn the Repellent?' and 'Haydn the Withdrawn'. All resound in *The Seasons*. Here's Haydn's genius at its keenest but never so trenchantly revealed as in Paul McCreesh's prodigious interpretation.

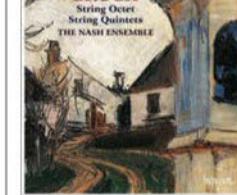
It's a feast for the ears; the whole venture distils all the heady excitement of a genuine theatrical event'

– Andrew Achenbach

Richard Bratby

Bruch Two String Quintets. String Octet
The Nash Ensemble

Hyperion **F** CDA68168 (05/17)



In a strong year for chamber music, this disc narrowly missed out on a *Gramophone* Award. But this programme of neglected late works by Max Bruch includes at least one genuine masterpiece, the A minor String Quintet. And the Nash Ensemble play it like the ink is still fresh on the page.

Alexandra Coghlán

'Lost is my quiet'

Carolyn Sampson sop

Iestyn Davies counterten

Joseph Middleton pf

BIS (F) BIS2279 (11/17)

A late contender from me – Iestyn Davies and Carolyn Sampson's flawless recital of songs and duets by Purcell, Mendelssohn, Schumann and Quilter. The programming may seem diffuse, but there's an alchemy to these performances that transforms this into quite the most engaging (and just a little offbeat) release of the year.



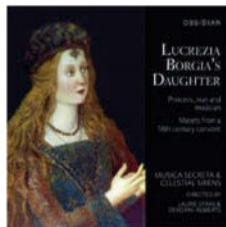
Edward Breen

'Lucrezia Borgia's Daughter'

Musica Secreta; Celestial Sirens /

Laurie Stras, Deborah Roberts

Obsidian (F) CD717 (05/17)



This album represents all that is trailblazing about early music: creative research and thrilling performances uniting sopranos and altos from different generations of

leading British vocal ensembles. The passionate and, frankly, sensual vocal polyphony from the convent of Corpus Domini in Ferrara, home of Lucrezia Borgia's daughter, is a revelation.

Jed Distler

'André Cluytens: The Complete Orchestral & Concerto Recordings'

Erato (S) (65 discs)

9029 58866-9 (7/17)



Few conductors were so equally authoritative and vital in Russian, German and French music as André Cluytens, as this vast, eclectic and unfailingly interesting collection consistently proves. It also preserves the all-but-vanished performance tradition of French orchestras, whose crisp sonorities and pronounced timbral diversity flourished under Cluytens's watch.

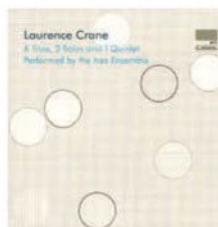
PHOTOGRAPHY: SAM MURRAY-SUTTON, BENJAMIN EALOVEGA

Liam Cagney

'Crane 6 Trios, 2 Solos and 1 Quintet'

Ives Ensemble

Nimbus Alliance (F) NI6337 (4/17)



The seemingly prosaic surface of Laurence Crane's music belies its strange depths. These chamber works repeat ostensibly simple melodic and rhythmic motifs to a vivifying end. If comparisons to Satie and Feldman come to mind, the music is distinctively Crane's own, by turns whimsical, obsessive, pensive and sincere.

Adrian Edwards

'Vaughan Williams Scott of the Antarctic'

Ilona Domnich sop Christopher Nickol org

Royal Scottish National Women's Chorus and Orchestra / Martin Yates

Dutton Epoch (F) CDLX7340 (9/17)



The music for the film *Scott of the Antarctic* was a notable addition to the RVW discography this year with Martin Yates an assured guide to the polar landscape familiar from the *Sinfonia antarctica*, as he is to the portraiture of those explorers and their wives captured in the music omitted from the symphony and the final edit of the film.

Rob Cowan

'In Schubert's Company'

Yakov Katsnelson pf Riga Sinfonietta /

Maxim Rysanov va

Onyx (M) ② ONYX4183 (9/17)



For me, 'In Schubert's Company' must ultimately take the palm, principally because of Dobrinka Tabakova's *Fantasy Homage to Schubert* where the tremulous opening of the violin Fantasy emerges as if out of a dream. Schubert 'straight' and Schubert 'reimagined' coexist for an absorbing programme, superbly performed.

David Fanning

'Ustvolskaya Piano Sonatas Nos 1-6'

Antonii Baryshevskyi pf

AVI Music (F) AVI18553357 (11/17)



This year's reviewing has brought me several near-misses. Closest to the bull's-eye, I reckon, is the young Ukrainian Antonii Baryshevskyi's survey of the six piano sonatas by Galina Ustvolskaya, which restores to the catalogue some of the hardest-hitting music ever composed in the Soviet Union, performed here with exemplary intransigence.

Richard Fairman

Haydn *The Seasons* (sung in English)
Gabrieli Consort & Players / Paul McCreesh
 Signum M ② SIGCD480 (5/17)



For years I longed for Haydn's *The Seasons* to be as much fun as *The Creation*. René Jacobs undeniably achieved that,

and here now is Paul McCreesh, completely different but just as enthralling, presenting *The Seasons* on an authentically huge scale, sung in English, and bursting with generosity of spirit. The recording is a joy.

Charlotte Gardner

'In Schubert's Company'
Yakov Katsnelson pf Riga Sinfonietta /
Maxim Rysanov va
 Onyx M ② ONYX4183 (9/17)



Two discs chock-full of Schubert and Schubert-inspired riches, Rysanov wearing (with immense style and beauty) the multiple hats of solo performer, conductor, arranger and commissioner of new music. It's surely one of the year's most personal and creative releases, and for me one of the most continuously rewarding listening experiences.

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

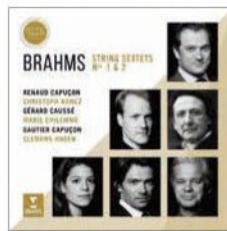
Bach 'Secular Cantatas'
 Vol 8' **Bach Collegium Japan / Masaaki Suzuki** BIS ② BIS2231 (8/17)

Two superlative panegyric cantatas for Elector August II are sprung with all the joyful elegance and attention to detail which define Suzuki and BCJ at their best. Sycophancy is but a contextual emblem from which composer and performer depart with delicious characterisation and geniality.



Andrew Farach-Colton

Brahms String Sextets Nos 1 & 2
Renaud Capuçon, Christoph Koncz vns
Gérard Chaussé, Marie Chillemme vas
Gautier Capuçon, Clemens Hagen vcs
 Erato ② 9029 58883-7 (6/17)



Brahms's youthful String Sextets are the musical equivalent of comfort food to me, and these live performances from Aix-en-Provence

get right to the warm heart of the music in their deft balance of joyous spontaneity and rapt attention to detail.

David Gutman

Mahler Symphony No 3
Gerhild Romberger contr Cantemus
Children's Choir, Bavarian Radio Chorus;
Budapest Festival Orchestra / Iván Fischer

Channel Classics M ② CCSSA38817 (6/17)



Iván Fischer's latest Mahlerian offering is outstanding. He is a fine musician with novel ideas and a terrific, ever-eager orchestra. What impresses most though, at a time when many releases are borrowed from broadcasters or engineered to be consumed on the move, is the glorious, deep-focus fidelity of the recorded sound.

Fabrice Fitch

Compère Missa Galeazescha.
 Music for the Duke of Milan
Odhecaton; La Pifarescha; La Reverdie;
Ensemble Pian&Forte / Paolo Da Col
 Arcana ② A436 (11/17)



A disc to which I've turned repeatedly is Loiset Compère's *Missa Galeazescha*, which showcases a repertory that the discography has tended to ignore.

Odhecaton leads a recording of substance and presence, in which voices and instruments (including organ) shine in equal measure.

Christian Hoskins

Bruckner Symphony No 3
 (1877 version, ed Nowak)
Staatskapelle Dresden /
Christian Thielemann
 Video director Elisabeth Malzer
 C Major Entertainment ② DVD 740808;
 ② Blu-ray 740904 (8/17)



Christian Thielemann's recording of the 1877 version of the Third Symphony is arguably the finest Bruckner he has given us, a performance of great splendour and eloquence, wonderfully articulated by the Staatskapelle Dresden and benefiting from excellent sound and video quality.



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Lindsay Kemp

JS Bach St Matthew Passion
Monteverdi Choir; English Baroque Soloists
/ Sir John Eliot Gardiner
SDG (M) 2 SDG725 (4/17)



It was a big-name release that moved me most this year: Sir John Eliot Gardiner's new live version of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* successfully draws together many of the profoundly human elements - not least compassion, community and integrity - that make it a true masterpiece of Western art.

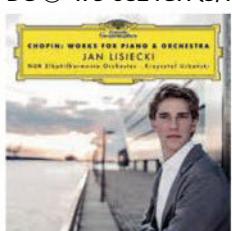
Andrew Mellor

'Music from the Peterhouse Partbooks, Vol 5'
Blue Heron / Scott Metcalfe
Blue Heron (F) BHCD1007 (10/17)

Plenty of discoveries here: rescued music of a surprisingly high quality from England's polyphonic Golden Age (the names John Mason and Hugh Sturmy were new to me) and an intriguing ensemble that sings it with precision, freshness, spirit and style. Volumes 1-4 for Christmas, please.

*Jeremy Nicholas*

Chopin Works for piano and orchestra
Jan Lisiecki (F) **NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra / Krzysztof Urbaniński**
DG (F) 479 6824GH (5/17)



DG issued three new major Chopin discs this year featuring Seong-Jin Cho, Daniel Trifonov and Jan Lisiecki. It is the latter, from Gramophone's 2013 Young Artist of the Year, that made the greatest impression in accounts of Chopin's four, less-frequently heard works for piano and orchestra. Lisiecki leaves competitors trailing in his wake.

Richard Lawrence

Humperdinck Hänsel und Gretel
Sols incl Daniela Sindram, Ileana Tonca; Vienna State Opera Orchestra / Christian Thielemann Euro Arts (F) **DVD** 207 2988; (F) **Blu-ray** 207 2984 (2/17)



Adrian Noble begins his unsentimental production of this Grimm fairy tale (pun intended) with a family celebrating Christmas in late-Victorian London: a magic lantern show put on for the children turns into reality. Anthony Ward's designs are entrancing, Christian Thielemann's conducting couldn't be bettered. Christmas stocking? Look no further.

*Christopher Nickol*

Reger 'Maximum Reger'
Various artists
Fugue State Films (F) **DVD** FSFDVD011 (6/17)



Reger's reputation lies primarily with virtuoso organists; however, this box-set also features a distinguished roster of instrumentalists, chamber ensembles and orchestras - all giving wonderful performances. Together with the accompanying documentary, these DVDs prove that Reger deserves to be mentioned in the same breath as Bach, Brahms, Liszt and Schoenberg.

Ivan Moody

'Nature and the Soul'
Latvian Radio Choir / Kaspars Putniņš
LMIC/SKANi (F) 054 (A/17)



An outstanding collection of Latvian choral music, celebrating the 100th anniversary of the country's independence and featuring

work by superb composers such as Emils Dārziņš and Jānis Zālītis. Sung with moving passion and absolute precision, this is a recording that resonates in the mind and spirit.

*Geoffrey Norris*

Rachmaninov Piano Concerto No 2; Études-tableaux, Op 33, etc
Boris Giltburg (F) **Royal Scottish National Orchestra / Carlos Miguel Prieto**
Naxos (M) 8 573629 (10/17)



The fusion of freshness with generous spirit and soul lends an enthralling dynamism to this familiar repertoire. Boris Giltburg faithfully observes Rachmaninov's marks of expression in the concerto and the Op 33 études, but there is a fluid imagination at work here tied to an enquiring musical intelligence.

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Richard Osborne

Bach Magnificat
Monteverdi Choir; English Baroque
Soloists / Sir John Eliot Gardiner
Soli Deo Gloria (F) SDG728 (12/17)



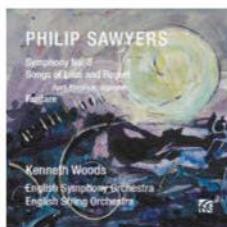
Hidden behind the curious cover of the Monteverdi Choir's newest CD is a superb re-creation of the music Bach wrote for his first Christmas in Leipzig

in 1723. The centrepiece is the *Magnificat*, richly contextualised and in its original key, in a performance that is as spectacular as it is affecting.

Guy Rickards

Sawyers Symphony No 3, etc
April Fredrick sop English Symphony Orchestra; English String Orchestra / Kenneth Woods

Nimbus Alliance (F) NI6353 (10/17)



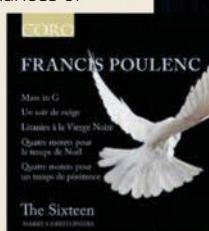
What an astonishing year for British symphonies on disc: the last of Havergal Brian's to be issued (11/17), the first by both David Hackbridge Johnson (6/17) and Steve Elcock (10/17), plus Pickard's Fifth (A/17). Philip Sawyers's classically structured Third, however, out-compels its rivals in sweep, scope and the ESOs gripping performance.

Marc Rochester

Poulenc Choral works
The Sixteen / Harry Christophers

Coro (F) COR16149 (4/17)

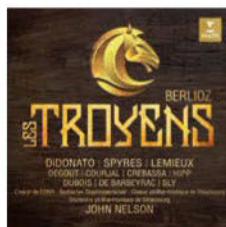
With Christmas in mind, magical choral singing seems the order of the day, and I've heard plenty of that this year from The Sixteen. Their fabulous recording of James MacMillan's *Stabat mater* is not for Christmas, but their Poulenc disc has divine performances of the *Motets pour le temps de Noël* so I plump for this. It really is the stuff of dreams.



Mark Pullinger

Berlioz Les Troyens
Sols incl Joyce DiDonato, Michael Spyres; Opéra du Rhin Chorus; Baden State Opera Chorus; Strasbourg Philharmonic Chorus and Orchestra / John Nelson

Erato (B) 9029 57622-0 (12/17)



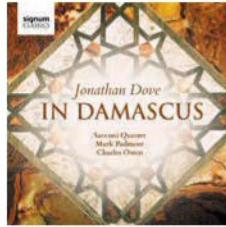
My operatic event of the year, despite being a concert performance, is now my disc of the year, too. John Nelson and Erato assembled a cast to die for in this terrific *Troyens*, led by tenor-of-the-moment Michael Spyres on thrilling form.

Malcolm Riley

Dove In Damascus. Out of Time. Piano Quintet
Mark Padmore ten Charles Owen pf

Sacconi Quartet

Signum (F) SIGCD487 (8/17)



Of all the discs I've had the pleasure of reviewing, the recent chamber/vocal disc of Dove's music stands out head and shoulders above the rest. It is a recording that I frequently return to. Mark Padmore 'owns' *In Damascus* as no one else could, while Charles Owen and the Sacconi Quartet show Dove's lighter touch in the effervescent Piano Quintet. A joyous release.

Peter Quantrill

Montgeroult Piano Sonata No 9. Études
Edna Stern pf

Orchid (F) ORC100063 (4/17)



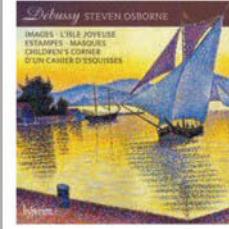
Coming to know more about Hélène de Montgeroult has been a highlight of my year. Her music is as eventful as her life: a student of Clementi, Dussek and Reicha, she was spared the guillotine by improvising variations on the 'Marseillaise', and later became the first female piano professor at the Paris Conservatoire. Edna Stern's playing is beautifully modulated, full of fantasy and high spirits.

Patrick Rucker

Debussy Children's Corner. ... d'un cahier d'esquisses. Estampes. Images, Books 1 & 2. L'isle joyeuse. Masques

Steven Osborne pf

Hyperion (F) CDA68161 (10/17)



If durability is an indicator of value, the one recording I've returned to most this year, always with delight and admiration, is Steven Osborne's Debussy recital. Here are *Images*, *Estampes*, *Children's Corner*, and sundry others, wrought with luxurious finesse, plus a *L'isle Joyeuse* that elevates joy to ecstatic delirium.



Edward Seckerson

Pasek/Paul Dear Evan Hansen
Original Broadway Cast
Atlantic Ⓛ 7567 86625-1 (10/17)



Now that I am reintroducing selected musical theatre releases into the mix of *Gramophone* I shall put my money where my mouth is and highly commend this year's Tony Award-winner for Best New Musical: *Dear Evan Hansen*. The gifted songwriting team of Benji

Pasek and Justin Paul with book writer Steven Levenson have come up with a cracking piece about social media in the virtual age. A fertile and vibrant score that fairly pops from the page.

Hugo Shirley

R Strauss 'Through Life and Love'
Louise Alder sop **Joseph Middleton** pf
Orchid Ⓛ ORC100072 (9/17)

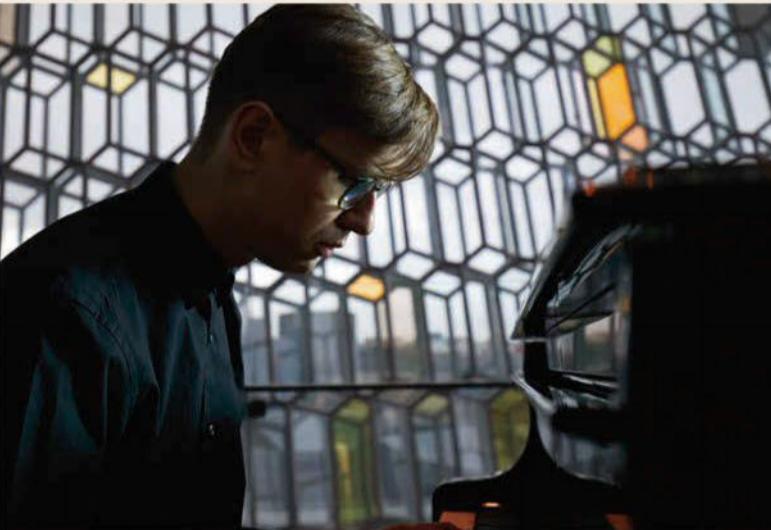


Of all the new recordings I've heard this year, I'm not sure any has given such unalloyed pleasure as Louise Alder's debut recital: an irresistible Strauss programme sung with a beguiling twinkle in the eye, keen intelligence and a voice of sparkling beauty. She's brilliantly accompanied by Joseph Middleton.

Pwyll ap Siôn

Glass Études - selection. **Glassworks** - Opening
Víkingur Ólafsson pf with **Siggi Quartet**
DG Ⓛ 479 6918GH (4/17)

I found myself returning time and again this year to Víkingur Ólafsson's excellent recording of Glass's *Études*. Both technically brilliant and highly individualistic, Ólafsson's performance pulls off that rare thing: he illuminates a familiar set of pieces in new and refreshing ways, proving - if nothing else - that, in the right hands, minimalist music can offer a rich and diverse range of interpretations and listening experiences.





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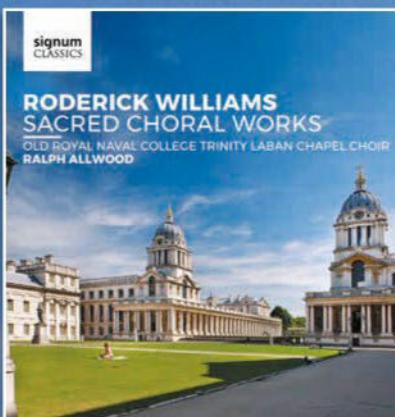
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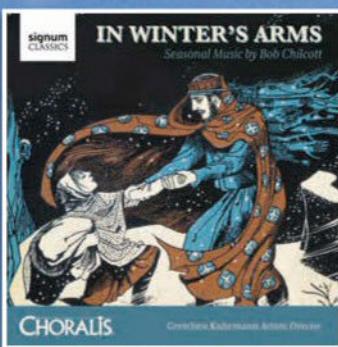
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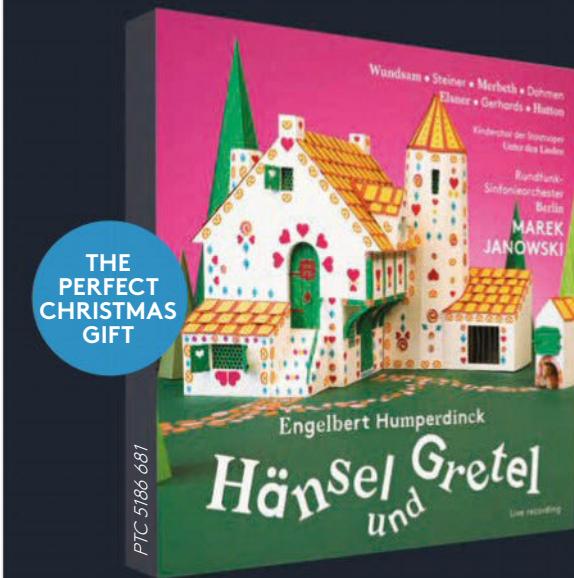
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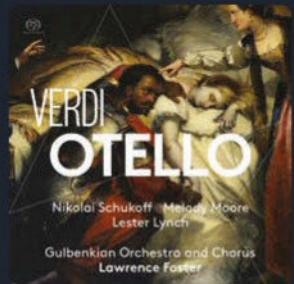
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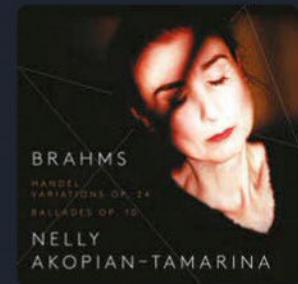
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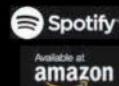
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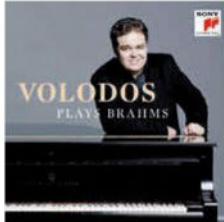
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Harriet Smith

Brahms Piano Pieces - Op 76 Nos 1-4; Op 117; Op 118
Arcadi Volodos pf
 Sony Classical (F) 88875 13019-2 (6/17)



This has been a vintage year for remarkable pianists playing great repertoire - Zimerman's Schubert, Rana's Bach and Osborne's

Debussy - but pipping them to the post is the velvet-toned Arcadi Volodos, whose Brahms recital is one of the most sheerly beautiful recitals I've ever encountered, illuminating even the most familiar pieces through his profound musicianship.

David Vickers

Gibbons 'In Chains of Gold: The English Pre-Restoration Verse Anthem, Vol 1'
Magdalena Consort; Fretwork; His Majestys Sagbutts & Cornetts
 Signum (F) SIGCD511 (11/17)



Fretwork and the Magdalena Consort's fresh take on Gibbons's consort anthems asks all sorts of awkward questions - such as what types of instruments, pitches and voices might have been expected in private Jacobean chapels - and comes up with a beguiling synergy of curiosity, creativity and musical insights.

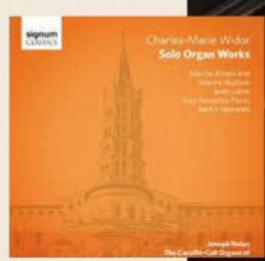
William Yeoman

Widor Solo Organ Works

Joseph Nolan

Signum (B) ② SIGCD438 (9/17)

West Australian-based organist Joseph Nolan brought his complete traversal of Widor's organ works to a reposeful end with this final volume, the smaller-scale works therein largely eschewing grand symphonic gestures in favour of intimacy, reflection and some delicate colours. Surprisingly, it reminded me of the many recordings of solo lute music I'd enjoyed throughout 2017.



David Patrick Stearns

Berlioz *Les Troyens*
Sols incl. Joyce DiDonato, Michael Spyres; Opéra du Rhin Chorus; Baden State Opera Chorus; Strasbourg Philharmonic Chorus and Orchestra / John Nelson

Erato (B) ④ 9029 57622-0 (12/17)

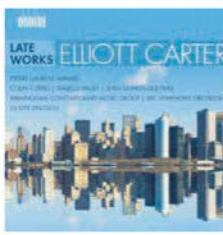


So often, *Les Troyens* casts have make-do choices in this epic opera. Here, singers, all ideal in their own ways, aren't as heroic as the Wagnerians sometimes cast,

but the single overriding message in this performance is that these characters are more human than iconic. I'll take this production over the more slick *Troyens* predecessors any day.

Richard Whitehouse

Carter 'Late Works'
BCMG; BBC Symphony Orchestra / Oliver Knussen Ondine (F) ODE1296-2 (9/17)



Ondine's release of late works by Elliott Carter reaffirms this composer's fluency and inventiveness into his 11th decade. Featuring dedicated

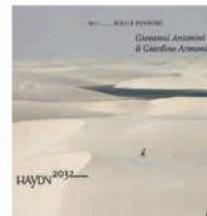
exponents such as pianist Pierre-Laurent Aimard and conductor Oliver Knussen, with Birmingham Contemporary Music Group and the BBC Symphony Orchestra, it embodies the highest standards of composing, performance and production.

David Threasher

'Haydn 2032 - No 3, Solo e pensoso'

Francesca Aspromonte sop

Il Giardino Armonico / Giovanni Antonini
 Alpha (F) ALPHA672; (F) ② (C) ALPHA673 (5/17)



The remastered anniversary edition of The Beatles' *Sgt Pepper* opened my ears afresh to an album whose every groove I thought I knew intimately. Giovanni Antonini has been doing the same with Haydn's symphonies: his third instalment contains two particular favourites, Nos 4 and 42, from his early and middle periods.

Richard Wigmore

Haydn *The Seasons* (sung in English)
Gabrieli Consort & Players / Paul McCreesh
 Signum (M) ② SIGCD480 (5/17)



This Anglo-Polish collaboration presents Haydn's celebration of rural life on the grand scale of its 1801 premiere. With van Swieten's English

cleaned up, McCreesh et al thrillingly catch the music's vitality, vibrant colours (never have the hunt and wine harvest sounded more riotously exuberant) and lyrical charm. Led by the vernal-toned Carolyn Sampson, the three soloists sing with unfailing style and character.



MUSIC COMPETITIONS **GUIDE**

Our international guide to music competitions includes information on how to enter, and also how to be in the audience – and with an increasing number of music competitions now being live-streamed, just about anyone can watch and get caught up in the excitement



Niklas Benjamin Hoffmann, winner of the 14th Donatella Flick LSO Conducting Competition at the Barbican in 2016 – the next competition will be held in 2018

UK GUIDE

BBC Cardiff Singer of the World

Next competition: June 15-22, 2019

Applications close June 30, 2018

This biennial competition is a high-profile springboard for international careers, with its latter stages broadcast by the BBC. The competition offers an overall first prize (worth £15,000), a song prize (£7,500) and the Dame Joan Sutherland audience prize (£2,500).

bbc.co.uk

BBC Young Musician of the Year

Next competition: 2018

Category finals March 16-20, semi-final March 23, final May 13

Applications closed

Another biennial competition from the BBC, this is open to string, percussion, woodwind, brass and keyboard players under the age of 18. The 2016 edition was won by cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason who signed to Decca soon afterwards, following in the footsteps of previous winners, violinist Nicola Benedetti and pianist Benjamin Grosvenor. Other distinguished winners since the competition's inception in 1983 include oboist Nicholas Daniel, cellists Guy Johnston and Natalie Clein, and clarinettists Emma Johnson and Mark Simpson. The overall winner receives a cash prize of

£3000, while each finalist also receives the support of a two-year aftercare scheme funded by the BBC and run by the Young Classical Artist Trust (YCAT). The competition also bestows – at its discretion – the Walter Todds Bursary, on a player or players who show great promise but don't reach the final. The category finals, semi-finals and final are all recorded for BBC broadcast.

bbc.co.uk

Donatella Flick LSO Conducting Competition

Next competition: 2018

Applications open December 2017

Established in 1990, this biennial competition's aim is to launch the career of European conductors under the age of 30. In addition to an award of £15,000, the first prize-winner is offered the opportunity to become Assistant Conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra for up to one year. The finals are held in the Barbican Centre and Guildhall School of Music & Drama, with the three finalists conducting the LSO. Previous winners include Elim Chan, David Afkham and François-Xavier Roth. iso.co.uk/iso-discovery/donatella-flick-lso-conducting-competition

Handel Singing Competition

Next competition: 2018
First round February 28 - March 2,
semi-finals March 28, finals April 10
Applications open January 5, 2018

Established in 2002, this major Baroque vocal competition for singers aged between 23 and 34 now attracts some 150 international competitors. Past finalists include Lestyn Davies, Ruby Hughes and Lucy Crowe. The competition semi-final at Grosvenor Chapel, and its final, at St George's Hanover Square, are open to the public as part of the annual London Handel Festival; up to six finalists perform, accompanied by the London Handel Orchestra under Laurence Cummings. The top prize is worth £5000. london-handel-festival.com/page/competition/24/

The Kathleen Ferrier Memorial Scholarship Fund Competition

Next competition:
April 25 & 27, 2018
Applications close February 1, 2018 (singers), March 1, 2018 (accompanists)

Held annually at Wigmore Hall, this competition is open to singers of all nationalities who have completed at least one year of study in the UK or Ireland. First prize is £12,500, second is £6000, there's a Ferrier Loveday song prize of £5000 and a Help Musicians UK Accompanist's prize. The semi-finals and finals are in public at the Wigmore. The 2017 first prize was won by baritone Julien Van Mellaerts, second by tenor James Way, the song prize by countertenor Patrick Terry, and the accompanist's prize by Gamal Khamis. The 2018 edition marks the competition's 63rd year. ferrierawards.org.uk

The Leeds International Piano Competition

Next competition: first rounds in Berlin, Singapore and New York April 2018, Leeds: second round September 6-8, semi-finals September 9-11, concerto final September 14 & 15
Applications closed

Leeds Competition

Under the joint new artistic direction of Paul Lewis and Adam Gatehouse, the triennial Leeds Competition, which is open to pianists aged between 20 and 29, is looking very exciting indeed. First prize is £25,000 plus a portfolio of other opportunities. These include a concerto appearance with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic under Vasily Petrenko on the opening night of their season, plus other dates with the Hallé and the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra. Also on offer are solo recital appearances at Wigmore Hall, Southbank and Amsterdam Concertgebouw, a recording on Champs Hill Records, and mentoring from Paul Lewis and other jury members (the jury includes Imogen Cooper, Lars Vogt and Simon Trpceski). Second prize is £15,000, third prize is £10,000. Furthermore, one of the prizewinners will be offered artistic management by the leading artists' agent Askonas Holt. There's also a new festival atmosphere to proceedings, not only by way of talks, masterclasses and screenings over the actual competition, but also through a brand-new annual Leeds Piano Festival in Leeds and London between May 14-22. This features past winners such as Lars Vogt, Alessio Bax and Sunwook Kim, and also young scholars of the competition's new global partner, the Lang Lang International Music Foundation. The competition will be streamed on Medici TV, and an enhanced partnership with BBC Radio 3 sees the semi-finals and finals broadcast on BBC Radio 3, and the finals also in deferred broadcast on BBC Four. leedspiano.com

Pierre Fournier Award

Next competition: 3-4 July 2018
Applications close March 26, 2018

Open to cellists of all nationalities aged 30 or under on July 1, 2018, this biennial competition was founded in 1988 by Ralph Kirshbaum.

It offers a recital at London's Wigmore Hall, a professional recording of this recital, as well as orchestral and chamber music performances with affiliated organisations.

pierreournieraward.com

RNCM James Mottram International Piano Competition

Next competition:
November 26 - December 1, 2018

This major biennial event at the Royal Northern College of Music offers an all-round learning experience for young pianists under the age of 30 from all over the world, mixing opportunities to perform on the concert platform with a series of masterclasses given by a distinguished international jury. The competition final in the RNCM Concert Hall is accompanied by a full orchestra, and there is a substantial prize fund, including a first prize of £10,000. On the jury are Danwen Wei, Tamás Ungár, Yoheved Kaplinsky, Kevin Kenner, Michael Lewin, Gabriel Kwok, Craig Sheppard and Graham Scott.

rncm.ac.uk/jmipc

St Albans International Organ Competitions

Next competition: July 2018

Applications: see website

The 30th edition of this competition is open to organists of all nationalities.

organfestival.com

Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition

Next competition: April 10-15, 2018

Applications closed

First established in 1979 as the Portsmouth International String Quartet Competition (when it was won by the then unknown Takács Quartet), this triennial competition moved to Wigmore Hall in 2010. It was won in 2015 by the Van Kuijk Quartet. The 2018 edition offers three top prizes of £10,000, £6000 and £3000, plus professional development opportunities which will be announced at a later date. The preliminary

rounds are held at the Royal Academy of Music. The semi-finals and finals will be at Wigmore Hall, and these will be streamed. There's also a surrounding programme of events that crucially allow British audiences to get to know the competing string quartets that are not based in the UK, through a series of lunchtime concerts. The jury, chaired by Wigmore Director John Gilhooly, includes violist Nobuko Imai, cellist András Fejér from the Takács Quartet, and violinist Heime Müller, formerly of the Artemis Quartet.

wigmore-hall.org.uk/string-quartet-competition/2018-competition

Windsor Festival International String Competition

Next competition: March 2019
Applications open September 1 - December 1, 2018

This biennial competition, launched in 2008 as a tribute to Yehudi Menuhin, aims to seek out the exceptional string soloists of tomorrow. Previous winners include violinists Nathan Meltzer, Jiyoon Lee and Benjamin Baker. Prizes for the 2017 competition included cash prizes, a concerto appearance with the Philharmonia Orchestra, a solo album recording with Champs Hill Records, and a fine contemporary bow made by Bishop Instruments & Bows.

windsorfestival.com/international-string-competition

York Early Music International Young Artists Competition

Next competition: July 11-13, 2019

Applications close January 2019

Based at York's National Centre for Early Music, this biennial period-performance competition invites applications from instrumental and vocal ensembles of two or more musicians. Prizes include a CD recording with Linn Records, and a route to the prestigious Emerging project. The 2017 competition was won by the Belgian ensemble BarrocoTout.

nemc.co.uk

EUROPE GUIDE

Aarhus International Piano Competition

Next competition: March 15-23, 2019

Applications close November 15, 2018

This Danish competition has two age groups: category A for pianists born between 2003 and 2008, with a first prize of €6000, and B for pianists born between 1997 and 2003, with a first prize of €8000 and a concert appearance with the Aarhus Symphony in the following season. Other prizewinners will be offered concerts in Danish music societies and festivals.

pianocompetition.dk

Aeolus International Competition

Next competition: September 18-23, 2018

Applications close April 30, 2018

Based in Düsseldorf and open to all nationalities born on or after January 1, 1990, this year's disciplines are bassoon, horn and oboe. Among the cash prizes are €10,000 for first, €7000 for second, and €6000 for third. The prizewinners' concert will be both live streamed and radio broadcast on Deutschlandfunk.

aeoluswettbewerb.de

Aram Khachaturian International Competition

Next competition: June 6-14, 2018

Applications close April 25, 2018

Rotating its disciplines between piano, violin, vocal, conducting and cello, in 2018 this annual Yerevan-based competition is open to cellists aged between 16 and 22. The top prize is a cash reward equating to US\$15,000, along with two concerts during the 2018/19 and 2019/20 concert seasons.

khachaturian-competition.com

ARD International Music Competition

Next competition:

September 3-21, 2018

Applications close March 31, 2018

This Munich-based classical music competition is Germany's

largest: high-profile former winners include Jessye Norman, Christoph Eschenbach and Mitsuko Uchida. Open to musicians aged between 17 and 29, the categories for 2018 are voice, trumpet, viola and piano trio. The first prize for soloists is €10,000 and for piano trio, €18,000. There are also international concert engagements to be won, plus radio broadcasts. Semi-finals, final and prizewinners' concerts are streamed live on the competition's website, as well as via Facebook Live on the BR Klassik Facebook channel. Bavarian Radio will broadcast the competition through its various programmes.

br.de/ard-music-competition

Besançon International Competition for Young Conductors

Next competition:

September 9-14, 2019

Previous winners of this biennial French competition established in 1951 include Alexander Gibson, Sergiu Comissiona, Gerd Albrecht, Seiji Ozawa, Michel Plasson and, more recently in 2015, Jonathon Heyward. It's open to conductors under the age of 35 and offers a first prize of €12,000. The laureate may also be offered orchestral engagements and a three-month period of artistic guidance by Aimée Paret.

festival-besancon.com

The 1st International Chopin Competition on Period Instruments

Next competition:

September 2-14, 2018

Applications close May 1, 2018

Launched by the Fryderyk Chopin Institute to coincide with the 100th anniversary of Poland's independence, this new competition focusing on period instrument performance practice is planned to take place every five years. The starry jury includes Nikolai Demidenko and

Andreas Staier. There are three rounds, throughout which participants will have access to a selection of period and period-copy Erards, Pleyels, a Broadwood and others. The top three prizes are €15,000, €10,000 and €5000. In the third-round final, the six finalists will perform Chopin works of their choice with Poland's Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century. Running in collaboration with Polish Television and Radio, the competition will be broadcast and streamed internationally.

en.chopin.nifc.pl/institute/iccpinfo

Enescu Competition

Next competition:

September 1-23, 2018

Applications close April 15, 2018

Open to violinists, pianists, cellists and composers born on or after August 1, 1985 this biennial competition is part of the George Enescu International Festival, Romania's largest international cultural event, and has prizes to the order of €115,000. The George Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra accompanies the finalists, who alongside the cash prizes are competing for concert billings at the festival, among other performance opportunities. It is streamed live on medici.tv and mezzo.tv as well as on the competition and festival website.

festivalenescu.ro/en/competition-2018/

International Éva Marton Singing Competition

Next competition:

September 10-16, 2018

Applications close March 14, 2018

The second edition of this Hungarian competition is organised and hosted by the Liszt Academy, with its jury presided over by soprano Éva Marton. It's open to women aged 18-32 and men aged 18-35, and will be live streamed. In addition to cash prizes adding up to €42,000 in total, there are

also numerous special prizes, concerts and scholarships.

martoncompetition.hu

Geneva International Music Competition

Next competition:

October 27 - November 8, 2018

Applications close May 4, 2018

Founded in 1939, this competition's list of laureates includes Martha Argerich, Emmanuel Pahud and Georg Solti. The 2018 competition is for pianists and clarinettists born after November 8, 1988, the jury includes Joaquín Achúcarro, Peter Donohoe and Hortense Cartier-Bresson, and finalists have a chance to perform with the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande. The first prize is for CHF20,000, and laureates also have access to a career development programme co-ordinated by the Competition's concert agency, Promusica-Genève. Both the semi-final and final will be filmed, recorded and broadcast live via radio and video streaming.

concoursgeneve.ch

Géza Anda Competition

Next competition: June 2-12, 2018

Applications close January 31, 2018

Open to pianists born after June 3, 1986, this Zurich and Winterthur-based competition offers CHF60,000 of prizes, and the top three will also win concert appearances between 2018 and 2021 organised by the Géza Anda Foundation, along with management for the three years following the competition. The jury is chaired by Christian Zacharias, who will also be conducting the final.

geza-anda.ch

The International Edvard Grieg Piano Competition

Next competition:

September 1-9, 2018

Applications close April 20, 2018

Hosted by the Edvard Grieg Museum in Bergen, this competition is open to pianists of any nationality born between



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INTERNATIONAL SINGING COMPETITION

VIII 20–29 MAY 2019
HELSINKI

CATEGORIES:
WOMEN BORN IN 1989 OR LATER
MEN BORN IN 1987 OR LATER

DEADLINE FOR APPLICATION:
30 NOVEMBER 2018

PRIZES TO BE AWARDED
IN BOTH CATEGORIES:

I	30 000 €
II	20 000 €
III	15 000 €
IV	10 000 €

SPECIAL AND
ENGAGEMENT PRIZES

1985 and 2001 and offers its winning pianist a cash prize of €30,000, along with engagements at Troldhaugen and in Berlin. The final is at Grieg Hall with Edward Gardner and the Bergen Philharmonic. griegcompetition.com

International Singing Competition for Wagner Voices

Next competition:

September 27-29, 2018

Held triennially in Karlsruhe, this competition aims to identify singers with the potential of becoming Wagner specialists after further voice development and stage experience and is open to singers aged between 30 and 35 who have reached the end of their studies and are at the beginning of their professional careers.

wagnerstimmen.de

Fritz Kreisler Violin Competition

Next competition:

September 20-30, 2018

Applications close June 15, 2018

Open to violinists of all nationalities aged between 14 and 30, this Vienna competition offers prizes amounting to €70,000, divided between six main and six encouragement prizes. In addition, there is potentially a concerto appearance with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra for the overall winner, and the opportunity for CD recordings. fritzkreisler.com

The International Instrumental Competition Markneukirchen

Next competition: May 3-12, 2018

This annual competition alternates between string and wind instruments. The disciplines for 2018 are flute and bassoon, for competitors born on or after January 1, 1988 and the top three cash prizes are €7000, €5000 and €3500. instrumental-competition.de

International Johann Sebastian Bach Competition

Next competition: July 11-21, 2018

Categories for 2018's edition of this biennial Leipzig-based

competition are piano, harpsichord and violin/Baroque violin, for musicians born after July 21, 1985. In addition to cash prizes of €10,000, €7500 and €5000, special awards include a CD recording on Genuin Classics for one winner and concert engagements with the Leipzig Bach Festival and the Leipzig Bach-Museum. bachwettbewerbleipzig.de

International Maria Canals Music Competition

Next competition:

March 10-23, 2018

Applications for 2018 close December 15, 2017

Founded in 1954 and held at Barcelona's Palau de la Música Catalana, this annual competition is aimed at performers of all nationalities aged between 18 and 30. Disciplines rotate, and for 2018 it's the turn of pianists. The first prize is for €25,000 and special prizes include concert engagements, a recording, and a concert tour of China. The competition is broadcast live online, and videos of each round are available on the website shortly after each session. The Catalan classical music radio station Catalunya Música broadcasts the final live. mariacanals.org

International Mozart Competition Salzburg

Next competition:

string quartet February 2-8, voice February 9-15, 2018

The works of Mozart are at the heart of this biennial competition; 2018's disciplines are string quartet and voice. The main string quartet prizes are for €20,000, €12,000 and €8000, while the three top vocal prizes are for €15,000, €10,000 and €5000. There are plans for the final concerts to be recorded by the ORF Austrian Broadcasting Corporation. uni-mozarteum.at

International Percussion Composition Competition, Luxembourg

Next competition:

February 10-18, 2018

The competition is open to composers of any nationality and age, and this time is asking for a short work for percussion duo. The winner receives €2500. ipcl.lu/

International Vocal Competition 's-Hertogenbosch

Next competitions: opera and oratorio: September 7-15, 2018

Lieder: November 21-24, 2019

Applications for 2018 close January 24, 2018

Founded in 1954, the Netherlands' only classical vocal competition has a focus on 20th century and contemporary music. This year's competition is devoted to opera and oratorio, and is open to female singers aged 40 or less and male singers aged 42 or less. The opera and oratorio prizes both have cash awards of €7500 plus potential concerts and engagements with Dutch opera companies and orchestras. ivc.nu

International JM Sperger Competition for double bass

Next competition: July 22-29, 2018

Applications close June, 2018

This competition for double bassists born after January 1, 1983 offers a first prize of €8500, second prize of €4500 and third of €2500. Special awards include the loan of an instrument, a trip to New York, and specialist bows. The opening concert, semi-final and final will be live streamed. The competition will also be broadcast by partner NDR Radio/TV Hamburg. spergerwettbewerb.de

Joseph Joachim International Violin Competition Hannover

Next competition:

October 11-27, 2018

Applications close May 30, 2018

This internationally established triennial competition began in 1991 and is overseen by Stiftung Niedersachsen, an arts foundation in Lower Saxony. Monetary prizes amounting to €140,000 will be available, with the first prize being particularly appealing: €50,000, a three-year loan of a Guadagnini violin, the

production of a Naxos CD, and several debut concerts.

jv-hannover.de/en

Leyla Gencer Voice Competition

Next competition:

September 23-28, 2018

Applications close April 10, 2018

Organised by the Istanbul Foundation for Cultural and Arts (IKSV) and the Accademia Teatro alla Scala, this competition has Renato Bruson presiding over its 2018 jury and is open to singers aged between 18 and 32. IKSV plans to record and broadcast all rounds of the competition. Latter stages take place in the Süreyya Opera House and the top three cash prizes are for €12,500, €7500 and €3500. Other prizes on offer are a concert performance at the Istanbul Music Festival, a three-month scholarship at the Accademia Teatro alla Scala, and a concert with the Borusan Istanbul Philharmonic Orchestra. leylagencer.org/en

Livorno Piano Competition

Next competition:

January 22-27, 2018

Applications close December 15 and December 18, 2017 (young)

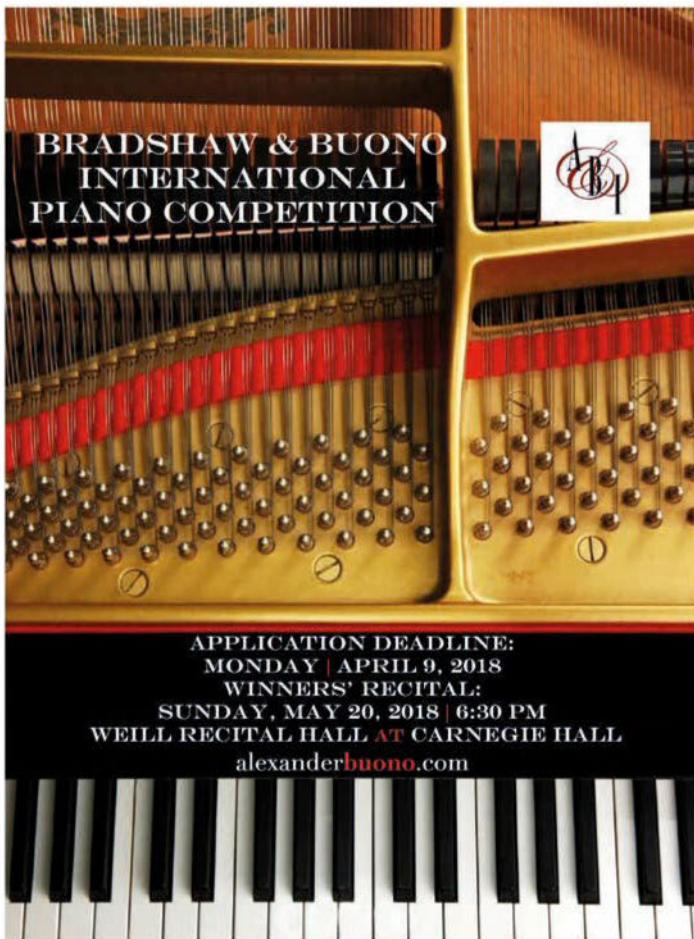
On its second edition, this competition's main category is for pianists born after January 1, 1985, with a top prize of €3000 plus concerts. There is also a young category for pianists born after January 1, 1995, competing for €500. livornopianocompetition.com

Lyons International Chamber Music Competition

Next competition: April 10-15, 2018

Applications close January 15, 2018

Established in 2004, this chamber music competition focuses on different instrumental groupings each year, with 2018 open to violin, cello and piano trios whose members were born on or after April 10, 1983. Cash prizes are for €12,000, €6000 and €4000 and there may also be professional engagements and career development opportunities available. Heats will be audio-



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Candidates must be under the age
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Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra
Kristian Gerhard Jebsen Foundation

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Ya-Fei Chuang • Lilya Zilberstein • Jan Jiracek Von Arnim • Leon McCawley

Application deadline: April 20, 2018
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and video-recorded for broadcast on the Université Lumière Lyon 2, NoMadMusic and France Musique websites. cimcl.fr

Mirjam Helin International Singing Competition

Next competition: May 20-29, 2019

Organised every five years by the Finnish Cultural Foundation, this prestigious competition can list Elina Garanča, René Pape and Julia Lezhneva among its former prizewinners. Preliminary rounds for the 2019 competition begin on May 20, with the finals being held at Helsinki Music Centre on May 29. mirjamhelin.fi/en

Menuhin Competition

Next competition: April 12-22, 2018

Previous winners of this biennial violin competition include Tasmin Little (1985) and Ray Chen (2008). It's open to violinists of any nationality aged under 22 (senior section) and 16 (junior section), as of April 22, 2018. The 2018 competition is held in Geneva; top prizes include a senior award of CHF15,000, and the Jonathan Moulds Award for Outstanding Potential, comprising the two-year loan of a Stradivarius violin. Heats will be live-streamed across the world. menuhinchampionship.org

Der Meistersinger von Nürnberg Singing Competition

Next competition: 20-21 July, 2018

Applications for 2018 close

January 15, 2018

Launched by the Nuremberg State Theatre in 2016, this biennial competition's particular focus is on developing singers of German repertoire. It's open to women aged 18-33, and men 18-35; the age limit rises to 43 and 45 respectively in the German category. Among the prizes is an overall top cash prize of €10,000. nurnberg-competition.com

Orléans International Piano Competition

Next competition: March 8-18, 2018

Established in 1994, this

competition is open to international pianists. The focus is repertoire from 1900 and later and each competitor must prepare a new competition commission. Awards include a prize of €120,000, plus concerts, residencies, a tour and a CD recording. oci-piano.com

Prague Spring International Music Competition

Next competition: May 7-15, 2018

The 2018 competition is open to cellists and French horn players born on or after May 7, 1988. Top cash prizes are for NOK200,000, NOK100,000 and NOK50,000 and there are a number of special prizes including the Czech Radio Prize of a studio recording and broadcast on Czech Radio. The cello jury, chaired by Michal Kařka, includes Anne Gastinel, Mikael Ericsson and Quirine Viersen. The French horn jury, chaired by Radovan Vlatković, includes André Cazalet and Kerry Turner. competition.festival.cz

Princess Astrid Competition

Next competition:

September 10-13, 2018

Applications close May 10, 2018
Established in 1952, this biennial competition arranged by Trondheim Symphony Orchestra rotates between violin and conducting, with 2018 for conductors (last won in 2016 by Elena Schwarz). It's open to musicians aged under 35 when the competition takes place. Awards include a first prize of NOK50,000 and a concert conducting the Trondheim Symphony Orchestra. tso.no

The Queen Elisabeth Competition, Brussels

Next competition: May 1-12, 2018

Disciplines of this annual competition rotate between piano, violin, voice and, as of last year, cello. Last year's first cellist winner, Victor Julien-Laferrière, has seen his profile increase dramatically since the competition. The 2018

competition is for singers under the age of 32. Those who make it to the final will be performing with La Monnaie/de Munt Symphony Orchestra under Alain Altinoglu. Prizes include a top three of €25,000, €20,000 and €17,000. The first round, semi-final and final are recorded for live or pre-recorded streaming, radio and television broadcast, and release on CD and DVD. qeimc.be

Robert Schumann Choir Competition

Next competition: June 6-10, 2018

Applications close: January 2, 2018
Focusing on works of German and international Romanticism, plus contemporary, this Zwickau-based choral competition takes place every four years. The 2018 edition of the competition coincides with the 206th anniversary of Schumann's birth and there's a top prize of €2000. interkultur.com

Smetana International Piano Competition

Next competition:

November 13-19, 2018

Applications close August 31, 2018
Held in Pilsen in the Czech Republic, this competition has three age categories: for pianists age 16 and younger, aged 20 years and younger and for those aged 30 years and less. Finalists in the 30-and-under category will perform with the Pilsen Philharmonic Orchestra. Top prizes for each of the three categories are for CZK 10,000, CZK 30,000 and CZK 50,000. piano-competition.com

Top of the World International Piano Competition

Next competition: June 2019

Open to pianists of all nationalities aged between 17 and 35, this competition takes place in Norway's midnight sun city, Tromsø. It's biennial, but the off-years are by no means quiet, because the competition organises a youth masterclass with the previous year's competition winner, to which the Barent region's young piano

talents aged 12-17 are invited. topoftheworld.no

Toulouse International Singing Competition

Next competition:

September 3-8, 2018

Applications close May 17, 2018

Held biennially in the city of Toulouse since 1954, young singers aged between 18 and 32 perform opera excerpts, oratorio and Lieder with at least one piece by a French composer. Competition finalists are accompanied by the Toulouse Capitole Orchestra. Top three prizes for male and female singers are €6500, €3200 and €1000 respectively. chant.toulouse.fr

Tromp International Percussion

Next competition:

November 8-18, 2018

Applications close May 1, 2018

This biennial competition for solo percussionists aged 30 and under was founded in 1971. Among the jury for 2018 are Michael Burritt, Martin Grubinger and Momoko Kamiya. The top prize is for €15,000, of which €7000 is reserved for further study, participation in other competitions and/or the purchase of instruments or scores within two years after the competition. trompperception.nl

Trondheim International Chamber Music Competition and Academy

Next Academy:

September 24-28, 2018

Next competition: 2019

Established in 2000, this biennial competition that alternates between string quartet and piano trio takes place during the annual Trondheim Chamber Music Festival; participants have free access to the Festival's concerts. During the non-competition years there's an academy focused on the chamber grouping of the following competition; for 2018 this will be for piano trio. ticc.no/competition

US & REST OF WORLD **GUIDE**



Since winning the Honens Piano Competition in 2012, Pavel Kolesnikov has become an acclaimed Hyperion recording artist

Alice & Eleonore Schoenfeld International String Competition

Next competition:
July 18-30, 2018

Applications close March 30, 2018

Held in Harbin, China, this international competition has three categories for violinists, cellists and chamber groups (the latter being divided into piano trio, piano quartet and string quartet). Violinists and cellists compete for a top prize of US\$30,000, while chamber groups stand to win US\$20,000.

schoenfeldcompetition.com

Bradshaw and Buono International Piano Competition

Next competition:
May 20, 2018 (Winners' Recital)

Applications close April 9, 2018

Founded in 2003 by the late David Bradshaw and Cosmo Buono, this competition has five categories: ages 4-11; ages 12-14; ages 15-18; amateur adults aged 19 and over; and music college students plus adults who have already launched their careers. Winners get the opportunity to perform in the Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall.

alexanderbuono.com

Dallas International Piano Competition

Next competition:
March 14-17, 2018

Open to pianists of all nationalities born on or after March 1, 1983, this annual competition is presented by the Dallas Chamber Symphony in partnership with the Meadows School of the Arts at Southern Methodist University. Its three rounds focus on concerto and solo recital repertoire, with a first prize of US\$1,500 up for grabs, plus a concerto appearance with the Dallas Chamber Symphony.

dallasipc.org

Hamamatsu International Piano Competition

Next competition:
November 8-25, 2018
Applications open between February 1 & April 15, 2018

Established in 1991 in commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the founding of Hamamatsu City, this biennial piano competition has Noriko Ogawa chairing its judging panel, and is open to international pianists born on or after January 1, 1988. The first prize is one worth

having too: ¥3,000,000, plus at least 10 opportunities to perform in and outside of Japan, including solo recitals and performances with major orchestras, until the end of March 2020. The winning performer will also receive a fee of ¥100,000 per concert. The competition has announced plans to stream all stages of the event.

hipic.jp

Honens Piano Competition

Next competition:
August 30 - September 8, 2018
Applications close November 8, 2017

This Canada-based competition has produced high-profile winners such as, in 2012, Pavel Kolesnikov, whose first recordings have attracted high praise in our pages. It's open to musicians aged between 20 and 30 and carries a first-place cash prize of C\$100,000 plus an artistic development programme valued at half-a-million dollars. The semi-finals and finals take place in Calgary, and among the seven-strong jury are Imon Barnatan and Ingrid Fliter, while collaborating

artists include baritone Benjamin Appl, and conductor Karina Canellakis. Visit honens.com or cbcsmusic.ca for live streaming of the semi-finals and finals.

honens.com

Indianapolis Violin Competition

Next competition:
31 August - 16 September, 2018
Applications close February 28, 2018

Founded in 1982, this quadrennial competition is open to violinists of any nationality aged between 16 and 30 at the time of the competition. Finalists perform with the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, and the programme requirements include a specially commissioned new work.

violin.org

Isangyun Competition

Next competition:
October - November 2018
Applications July 2018

Founded in 2003 in memory of the South Korean composer Isang Yun (1917-95), this competition alternates between disciplines; 2018 is for cellists, and 2019 is for pianists.

timf.org

Concours Musical International de Montréal

Next competitions:
Voice: May 27 - June 7, 2018
Violin: May 26 - June 6 2019
Piano: May 4-14, 2020
Applications for 2018 close December 15, 2017

Held annually since 2002, this competition rotates between voice, piano and violin. The 2018 vocal edition is open to male and female singers born on or after January 1, 1983. Singers can choose to compete in one or both of the Aria and Art Song divisions, with each offering a first prize of C\$30,000 plus a C\$50,000 career development grant. There's a total of C\$260,000 to be won, including a Pianist Award of C\$10,000. The 2018 orchestral rounds are accompanied by the

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JULY 18 - 30, 2018

Harbin, China

Application Deadline: March 30, 2018

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First Prize for Cello Division
USD 30,000

First Prize for Chamber Music Division
USD 20,000



Yu-Chien Tseng, winner of the Singapore International Violin Competition in 2016 and recipient of \$50,000 prize money

Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal under Graeme Jenkins, and the jury includes Kiri Te Kanawa, Felicity Lott, Edith Bers and Ben Heppner, with CMIM co-founder and President André Bourbeau presiding. All rounds will be live-streamed at concoursmontreal.ca/live, and will be available on demand after the event concoursmontreal.ca/voice

National Mondavi Center Young Artists Competition

Next competition:

April 18-29, 2018

Applications closed

This annual competition offers a US\$5,000 founders prize in rotating instrumental categories. For 2018 this is voice, open to US-resident singers aged between 18 and 24, and, in honour of the Bernstein centenary, the focus will be on the American song repertoire. Honorary Chairman of the competition will be baritone Thomas Hampson. There's also an annual \$1500 young artists prize, which is open to California-resident pianists and instrumentalists aged 12-17.

mondaviarts.org/events/young-artists-competition

Primrose International Viola Competition

Next competition: June 10-16, 2018
Applications close December 18, 2017

Founded in 1979 as the first international competition devoted solely to viola players, this competition is open to those instrumentalists born after January 1, 1989, who are ready for an international solo career. Chairing the jury for 2018 is cellist Lynn Harrell, and there's a cash top prize of US\$15,000. All rounds take place at the Colburn School in Los Angeles, and there will be live-streaming of the quarter finals, the semi-finals, the final chamber music round, and possibly also the final concerto round accompanied by the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra (potential online audiences are advised to check the website for details nearer the time). Running alongside the competition events is the American Viola Society Festival. primrosecompetition.org

Shanghai Isaac Stern International Violin Competition

Next competition:

August 10 - September 1, 2018
Applications close January 31, 2018

Hosted by the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, this international competition is open to violinists of all nationalities aged between 16 and 32, and offers a top cash prize of US\$100,000. Among the prestigious

jury members for 2018 are David Stern, Vera Tsu Weiling, Augustin Dumay and Maxim Vengerov. shcompetition.com

Singapore International Violin Competition

Next competition:

January 28 - February 6, 2018

Applications closed

This triennial competition for violinists under 30 offers cash prizes totalling \$10,000, with the top six competitors eligible for the three-year loan of a rare violin from the Yin Collection. There's also the opportunity to perform in the Esplanade and Victoria concert halls, and with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra. China-born violinist Qian Zhou chairs the international jury. singaporeviolincompetition.com

The Thomas and Evin Cooper International Competition for Piano

Next competition:

July 14-20, 2018

A joint venture between Ohio's Oberlin Conservatory of Music and the Cleveland Orchestra, this annual competition is open to accomplished young musicians aged 13-18, and rotates annually between the piano and violin. The 2018 competition is for pianists and carries a top prize of \$20,000. You can catch most of the

competition remotely too, as all the preliminary rounds (July 14-18) as well as the recital finals (July 18) will be streamed live via the competition's website. The concerto finals (July 20) at Cleveland's Severance Hall will be broadcast live on WCLV FM 104.9, Cleveland's classical station. www2.oberlin.edu/cooper/

Tokyo International Conducting Competition

Next competition:

8-14 October, 2018

Applications open January 31 - May 2, 2018

This triennial competition is open to applicants of all nationalities who are aged 38 or under by the time of the competition final on October 14. All rounds take place at Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall, with the applicants conducting the Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra in the two preliminary rounds, and then the New Japan Philharmonic Orchestra in the Final. Among the cash prizes is a top award of ¥2,000,000. conductingtokuo.org

Washington International Competition

Next competition:

June 22-24, 2018

Applications close March 1, 2018

Established in 1950, this competition rotates between piano, strings and voice. For 2018 it's strings, open to cellists, viola players and violinists aged between 18 and 28. Running alongside the instrumental competition is a composition competition focusing on works for string quartet. The top cash prizes for the three categories of string players comprise US\$10,000 each. There are also Washington-based solo concert opportunities available, including an appearance with the Avanti Orchestra. The semi-finals will take place at George Washington University, in the Benjamin T Rome Music Hall, while the finals will be held in the Terrace Theater of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. fmmc.org

The 10th Quadrennial

INTERNATIONAL VIOLIN COMPETITION OF INDIANAPOLIS

August 31 – September 16, 2018

Jaime Laredo, Jury President

Deadline for application: February 28, 2018

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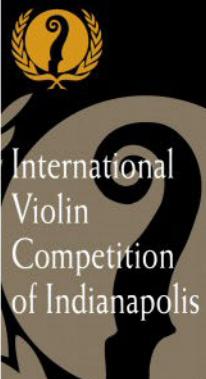
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GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Mark Pullinger is bowled over by an epic new recording of Berlioz's *Les Troyens*, caught live in Strasbourg with a luxury cast under the direction of John Nelson



Berlioz

Les Troyens

Joyce DiDonato	mez.	Didon
Michael Spyres	ten.	Énée
Marie-Nicole Lemieux	contr.	Cassandra
Stéphane Degout	bar.	Chorèbe
Hanna Hipp	mez.	Anna
Nicolas Courjal	bass	Narbal
Philippe Sly	bass-bar	Panthée
Marianne Crebassa	mez.	Ascagne
Cyrille Dubois	ten.	Iopas
Stanislas de Barbeyrac	ten.	Hylas/Hélénus
Jean Teitgen	bass	Ghost of Hector/Mercure
Bertrand Grunenwald	bass	Priam
Jérôme Varnier	bass	Frédéric Caton
Opéra National du Rhin Chorus; Baden State Opera Chorus; Strasbourg Philharmonic Chorus and Orchestra / John Nelson		Sentinels

Erato ® ④ 9029 57622-0 (3h 54' • DDD)

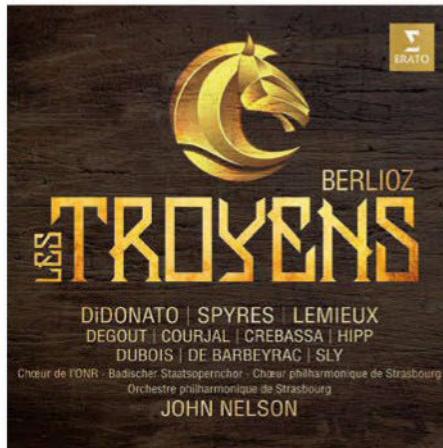
Recorded live at the Salle Erasmé, Strasbourg, April 15, 17 & 18, 2017

Bonus DVD includes highlights from the concert on April 15, 2017

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation

Hector Berlioz's epic opera *Les Troyens* has been lucky on disc. Complete recordings have been few but they've tended to be crackers: Colin Davis, that greatest of Berlioz champions, recorded it twice, first with the forces of the Royal Opera for Philips and then, in concert, with the London Symphony Orchestra, while Charles Dutoit made a very fine studio recording in Montreal.

Assembling a cast capable of doing justice to *Troyens* is no easy task and spying the line-up for a pair of concert performances in Strasbourg over the Easter weekend this year immediately had me salivating. A roster of star names such as Joyce DiDonato, Michael Spyres, Marie-Nicole Lemieux and Stéphane Degout would, I'd respectfully



The only hint that this recording is taken from live performances is the sheer adrenalin that pours through Berlioz's set pieces'

suggest, lie beyond the usual budget of the Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg, hinting at funding by a record label. It transpired that Warner Classics had put the cast together for this outstanding new recording under John Nelson on Erato,



All-star cast: Joyce DiDonato flanked by Nicolas Courjal and Hanna Hipp

taken from both concerts plus a patching session. I attended the second of those concerts in the red, Lego-brick auditorium of the Salle Erasmé and was duly bowled over by some extraordinary music-making. Happily, listening to these discs quickly confirmed those initial impressions.

What is immediately apparent is what splendid results the engineers have achieved. The only hint that this recording is taken from live performances is the sheer adrenalin that pours through Berlioz's spectacular set pieces, such as the visceral Royal Hunt and Storm from Act 4 (though what a shame there's no SACD surround-sound to do full justice to the brass and chorus deployed around the auditorium here). The sound is full and forward and beefy, with none of the cramped acoustics that limit Davis's LSO recording, made in the Barbican Hall. Nelson has conducted *Les Troyens* more than anyone else over the last 40 years and his experience draws remarkable playing from the OPS, which holds its own against classy competition on disc. Nelson is in no great rush, allowing Berlioz's music time to breathe where

necessary, satin strings to the fore, but he gives his players full rein in moments of high drama, especially the dramatic introduction to Act 2, with its bristling double basses. The mercurial woodwind-writing leaps out of the speakers, as do the bass trombone snarls as we learn of the sea serpent swallowing Laocoön. Three choruses, drawn from the Opéra National du Rhin, the Staatstheater Karlsruhe and the Chœur de l'Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg, offer tremendously full-blooded singing.

Erato is perhaps a little naughty in describing the score as 'absolutely complete', an accolade



The Strasbourg Philharmonic Chorus and Orchestra, further bolstered by two additional choruses, offer full-blooded support

surely only true of Charles Dutoit's recording, which includes the scene where Sinon, a Greek spy, convinces the Trojans that the wooden horse must be brought inside the city (a scene which Berlioz cut from the score in 1861) and the Act 3 prelude, composed for the 1863 performance of Acts 3 to 5, *The Trojans at Carthage*. But everything else is here, including all the ballet music including the sinuous *Pas d'Esclaves nubiennes*.

Nelson's cast is simply to die for. Marie-Nicole Lemieux captures all the wildness and unhinged desperation of Cassandre, her burnt caramel contralto utterly compelling. Hers is a far weightier voice than Deborah Voigt (Dutoit) or Petra Lang (Davis/LSO) and, considering she's never sung the role on stage, Lemieux's is an astonishingly three-dimensional, no-holds-barred portrait. She is joined by Stéphane Degout as a vibrant, urgent Chorébe, as sheerly beautiful a baritone as Peter Mattei for Davis. Their duet 'Revien à toi' is an early highlight.

Énée is sung thrillingly by Michael Spyres, the Berlioz tenor *de nos jour*, his

'Inutile regrets' virile and ecstatic but refined too. He doesn't have as huge a voice as Heldentenors Jon Vickers and Ben Heppner but this is very exciting singing. His love interest in Carthage comes via Joyce DiDonato's noble Didon, her lighter, brighter mezzo providing a nice contrast to Lemieux's Cassandre. Her distinctive flutter at the top may not be to everyone's taste but her performance – another role debut – is remarkably assured, full of tender ecstasy in the duet 'Nuit d'ivresse' with Spyres, and blending sumptuously with Hanna Hipp's sympathetic Anna. DiDonato's vehement response to Énée's desertion reveals her as a great tragedienne.

The luxury casting of the minor roles is jaw-dropping: Marianna Crebassa (bringing crystalline purity to Ascagne), Cyrille Dubois (a honeyed Iopas), Stanislas de Barbeyrac (Hylas) and Philippe Sly (a firm-voiced Panthée). I harbour doubts over Nicolas Courjal's woolly Narbal, but this is the tiniest quibble in a remarkable cast.

In short, this is a peach of a recording, with the strongest cast across the board of any *Troyens* recording setting a

thrilling new benchmark for this epic opera. **Mark Pullinger**

Selected comparisons:

Royal Op, C Davis (5/70th, 12/86th) (PHIL) ▷ 416 432-2PH4

Dutoit (12/94th) (DECC) ▷ 478 5577DC17

LSO, C Davis (8/01) (LSO) LSO0010

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BLU	Blu-ray	ℳ	no longer available
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ℳ		ℳ	only available separately

Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue



Orchestral



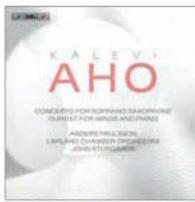
Andrew Mellor enters the strange world of Axel Borup-Jørgensen: *'It is a true tapestry in which no instrument takes a predominant role; at one point the violins alone divide into 55 parts'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 61**



Mark Pullinger enjoys a fun trip to the zoo with Saint-Saëns: *'Argerich and Pappano have tremendous fun as a pair of hesitant, apologetic amateur pianists'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 67**

Aho

Concerto for Soprano Saxophone and Chamber Orchestra^a. Quintet for Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon, Horn and Piano^b. Solo I^c
^bMarkku Moilanen ob ^bPekka Niskanen cl ^bAntal Mojzer bn ^bIikka Puputti hn ^aAnders Paulsson sop sax ^cJaakko Kuusisto vn ^bVäinö Jalkanen pf
^aLapland Chamber Orchestra / John Storgårds
BIS (F) BIS2216 (59' • DDD/DSD)



BIS's long-term commitment to the music of Kalevi Aho (impressive even by the standards of this label) continues with a disc that focuses on recent *concertante* and chamber works. The Concerto for soprano saxophone (2015) is among the most recent of Aho's substantial contribution to this genre, taken to a new level of refinement. Its three movements suggest a Classical format, though the first accelerates from an atmospheric 'Invocatio' into a *Presto* whose propulsion carries over into an intricate Cadenza; after which the central *Misterioso* unfolds an elegant melodic line over pensive harmonies, while the finale regains something of the earlier rhythmic energy on its way to a 'Quasi epilogo' that brings the work understatedly full-circle.

The Quintet for piano and wind instruments (2013) is formally a more orthodox conception, though not without elements of surprise or suspense. Here, the discursiveness of its opening movement is countered by an impetuous 'Toccata', then a sombrely expressive 'Nocturno' provides respite before the final 'Burlesco' accelerates to its exhilarating close.

Both Anders Paulsson and Väinö Jalkanen evince admirable musicianship, as does Jaakko Kuusisto in *Solo I* (1975), the first in what has become a sequence of 12 (to date) pieces which provide a latter-day counterpart to Berio's *Sequenza* series. The cadenza of Shostakovich's First Violin Concerto seems the likely precedent in its pursual of a trajectory from relative stasis to outright dynamism, though with audible

modal inflections along with that pivoting between tradition and innovation which has informed Aho's music throughout his maturity. **Richard Whitehouse**

Bartók

Concerto for Orchestra, Sz116. Dance Suite, Sz77. Rhapsodies^a - No 1, Sz87; No 2, Sz90
^aJames Ehnes vn
Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra / Edward Gardner
Chandos (F) CHSA5189 (80' • DDD/DSD)



How many labels still offer such generous repertoire-driven selections in physical format? Some years after Chandos released his successful Bartók miscellany with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (1/14), Edward Gardner is back with an 80-minute sequel featuring his own Bergen Philharmonic. He even has a star guest whose Chandos catalogue includes abundant Bartók. Only Hungaroton can hope to trump that – Barnabás Kelemen offers the alternative endings for both Rhapsodies with Zoltán Kocsis and the Hungarian National Philharmonic whereas James Ehnes gives us only the one for Part 2 of the First Rhapsody – but then the works are differently coupled across two discs as listed below.

The Canadian virtuoso has already set down Bartók's Violin and Viola Concertos (11/11) and the two Rhapsodies in their violin-and-piano versions (3/12) so he could scarcely be more familiar with the idiom. His admirers will be delighted to have the Rhapsodies in orchestral guise while knowing not to expect him to treat the notation of the First with the freedom of Joseph Szigeti and the composer himself in their Library of Congress recital (Pristine, 5/13). Forget too Yehudi Menuhin's peasant grit with Pierre Boulez in the late 1960s (Warner, 4/16), let alone the bendy pitch and intensified, 'in-your-face' vibrato of Kelemen and Kocsis. Ehnes and Gardner bring a more poised eloquence.

The main course is the ubiquitous Concerto for Orchestra, something of a party piece for the conductor, who directs his live renditions without a score and achieves a wonderful transparency. At the same time, those accustomed to Hungarian music-making may expect a little more passion and paprika in the mix. Although Gardner's tempos are not exactly sedate, he usually gives the material more space than Kocsis. The sonic perspective is also relaxed, conveying the impression of a sizeable hall but dampening the muscularity of the music-making. Boasting assertive woodwind and effervescent, un-grainy strings, the orchestra nevertheless acquires itself brilliantly. No one could complain of a lack of character in the second movement's woodwind couples even if the deadpan central chorale lacks flavour. In the 'Elegia' the precise articulation of the strings is complemented by penetrating, rather shallow brass timbres. The fourth movement finds Gardner unearthing less obvious melodic layers beneath the irregularly flowing big tune.

The Dance Suite is lighter on its feet in another reading notable for the exposure of unsuspected undergrowth. The surface is elegant, even glittery. For better or worse, Gardner's meticulous approach has the effect of bringing Bartók closer to our own time. Should that repositioning not put you off, the package is eminently recommendable, attractively designed and comes with booklet notes by Paul Griffiths.

David Gutman

Concerto for Orchestra, Dance Suite – selected comparison:
Hungarian Nat PO, Kocsis (HUNG) HSACD32187
Rhapsodies – selected comparison:
Kelemen, Hungarian Nat PO, Kocsis
(10/11) (HUNG) HSACD32509

Bigham

Archipelago Dances - Set 1; Set 2.
Two Nightscapes. Staffa
Royal Scottish National Orchestra /
Jean-Claude Picard
Aruna (F) ARUNACD002 (57' • DDD)



Youthful trumpet: Lucienne Renaudin Vary is joined by colleagues including Erik Truffaz on her debut disc – see review on page 71



There's a rhythmic trick at work in the first of Ned Bigham's *Archipelago Dances*

Set 1, a wily spacing of the piano chords that had me listening hard and repeatedly. Where's the tipping point in this chordal phrase? We never really know, which makes the canonic games of which it soon forms the basis even more alluring. That prompts you to listen differently to the lounge percussion that underpins this opening track's bachata groove. Any minute, you think, it will start to bend, strain or metamorphose.

But it doesn't. Bigham's music as portrayed on this release is founded on rhythm (he is a former session drummer) but the rhythmic smoke and mirrors of that opening track is as interesting, rhythmically or otherwise, as this recording gets. The next movement, a broad, American-sized Pavane, is played straight towards a sort of laconic explosion. The third is founded on a Puerto Rican plena but does nothing with it. And so on and so on – a Polka in *Archipelago Dances* Set 2 that cries out for direction, development or transformation; an Estampie complete with crimplene

cymbal scrapes that shuffles awkwardly away like an entire symphony orchestra dad-dancing with its eyes fixed on the floor.

There is something missing, literally, in the title piece *Staffa*, which was designed to accompany three concurrent pieces of film. But we don't get the visuals with this product – we don't get much (booklet notes deal with *Staffa* and nothing else) – so the music must be heard on its own terms. It was 'inspired by Mendelssohn's visit to Fingal's Cave', an experience which induced music of power, passion, terror, excitement and ultimately a broadening of the language. To my ears, the neatly overlapping shapes of that bachata *Archipelago Dance* speak far more of the island of Staffa's rock formations. But I am at a loss as to what Bigham's fluent noodling in his piece of the same name has to do with Mendelssohn's experience. I feel for sure that the symphony orchestra isn't the right medium for what he wanted to say in these pieces, and I fear that the fundamentals of the dance and symphonic genres he is trying to fuse have both been lessened by the process. **Andrew Mellor**

Bizet

Carmen - Two Suites. *L'Arlésienne* - Two Suites
Barcelona Symphony Orchestra / Pablo González
 Naxos (M) 8 573546 (70' • DDD)



What could be more appropriate than a Spanish orchestra and conductor to add local colour to Ernest Guiraud's suites arranged from Bizet's *Carmen*? And if Barcelona isn't quite Seville, it should matter little enough. Pablo González and the Barcelona Symphony Orchestra offer both *Carmen* suites, along with the two suites drawn from the incidental music to Alphonse Daudet's play *L'Arlésienne* on this well-filled Naxos disc.

Any newcomer has to measure up to my benchmark for this music, that by Charles Dutoit and the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal, which is done with great panache. Might the Barcelonans offer an earthier account? Well, partly. The Spanish bassoon is a good deal punchier in the 'Dragons d'Alcalá' interlude and the Naxos recording is beefier than its Decca counterpart (at the expense of extra woodwind clarity). González sets a flowing tempo for the Nocturne (Micaëla's Act 3 aria 'Je dis que rien ne m'épouvanter') but elsewhere is a touch slower than Dutoit. The Barcelona oboe offers smooth legato in the opening phrases of the Séguidille, whereas Dutoit's



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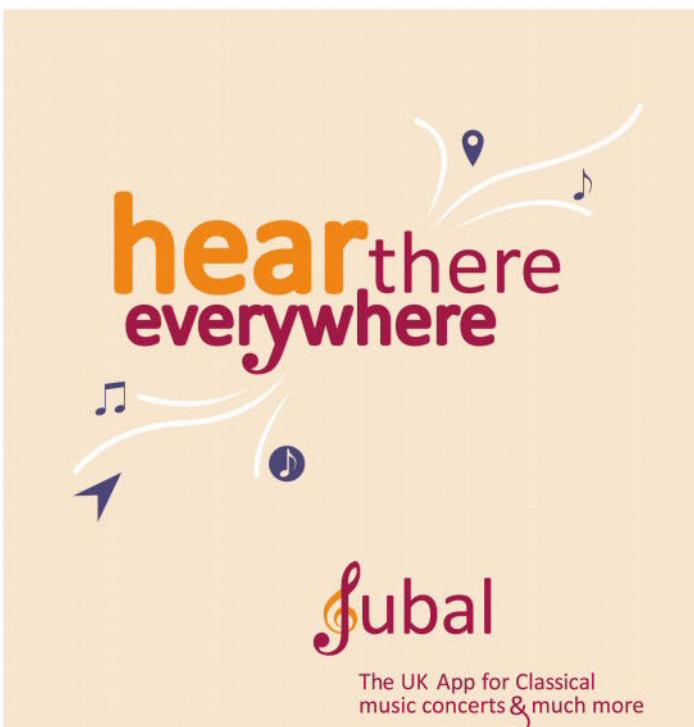
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oboe is far more coquettish. In short, the Barcelona performances are attractive without being anything out of the ordinary.

Ironically, González and his orchestra are more stylish – and certainly more nimble – in the Provençal setting of *L'Arlesienne*. The First Suite's Menuet zings along and the Carillon goes with a tremendous swing. Although the Barcelona principal flute can't quite match Timothy Hutchins's liquid fluidity in Montreal, these are persuasive performances, capped by an infectious Farandole to close.

Mark Pullinger

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

Montreal SO, Dutoit (6/88^R) (DECC)

466 421-2DM or 475 1902DF2

Borup-Jørgensen

SACD: *Marin*, Op 60^a. Music for Percussion and Viola, Op 18^b. Für Cembalo und Orgel, Op 133 No 2^c. Nachstück, Op 118 No 1^d. Winter Pieces, Op 30b^e. Pergolato, Op 183^f. Coast of Sirens, Op 100^g

DVD: *Marin – An Animated Fantasy*.

Axel – A Portrait Film

^aMichala Petri treb rec ^bElisabet Selin ten rec ^cTim Frederiksen va ^dErik Kaltoft pf ^eMahan Esfahani hpd ^fJens E Christensen org ^gPercurama Percussion Ensemble / Gert Mortensen; ^gÅrhus Sinfonietta / Søren Kinch Hansen; ^aDanish National Symphony Orchestra / Thomas Søndergård

OUR Recordings (F + DVD) 2 110426

(78' • DDD/DXD)



Marin was both a beginning and an ending for the Danish composer Axel Borup-Jørgensen, who put so much of

himself into the piece that he never wrote for orchestra on the same scale again. It was commissioned by the Danish Broadcasting Corporation in 1965 to celebrate 40 years of its symphony orchestra; the corporation and its then conductor Herbert Blomstedt knew the young composer from a competition earlier that year.

In *Marin*, Borup-Jørgensen delivered an engrossing and monolithic vision of the sea in various phases. As a listening experience it can be compared to pre-*Grand Macabre* Ligeti but the language occupies its own territory. The piece heaves itself up from the depths and, after nearly 20 minutes, disintegrates at height. It is a true tapestry in which no instrument takes a predominant role; at one point, the violins alone divide into 55 parts.

This product is a curious one in some respects, but its triumph is that it treats

Marin with the same everything-but-the-kitchen-sink approach that its creator did (it took Borup-Jørgensen seven years to write; he rented a separate house in which to spend 1000 hours completing the fair copy). Thomas Søndergård presides over an intense and clear reading of the score, recorded in DXD format, but that's just for starters. On a separate DVD – complete with a subtle and illuminating documentary study of the composer with input from a raft of great names in Danish music – we see a newly commissioned animated film by Morten Bartholdy. It conjures a curious, magical underwater world where semi-organic, abstract shapes are formed and coalesce as if prompted by the unfurling score itself.

Watching the film at the premiere in May, in the comfort of a Copenhagen cinema with *Marin* rumbling in full surround-sound, I was utterly seduced. Watching on a small screen inevitably has less impact; but still the synergy of music and image intrigues, despite the aesthetic specificity and oddity of the latter component (that's probably the point). Filling the SACD are works by the same composer that feature on previous OUR Recordings issues, and the level of performances is high: Mahan Esfahani, Michala Petri, Tim Frederiksen and many more feature, in addition to the composer's daughter and the guiding light behind the project, the recorder player Elisabet Selin, who gives a compelling performance of *Nachstück*. The English-language booklet could have used a professional proofread. But just like the essay 'On Hearing *Marin* in 2017: Reflections from a Young Person' by Agnete Hannibal Petri – Lars Hannibal and Michaela Petri's daughter – it's the eccentricity and comprehensiveness of this product that make it both affecting and worthwhile. **Andrew Mellor**

Brahms

Symphony No 2, Op 73. Variations on a Theme

by Haydn, 'St Antoni Chorale', Op 56a

WDR Symphony Orchestra, Cologne /

Jukka-Pekka Saraste

Profil (F) PH17057 (61' • DDD)



As ever with Brahms's D major Symphony there's the loaded question: are we talking a thoughtful work with occasional sunbeams reaching through the autumn mists or a 'happy' work with the odd shadow thrown in for contrast?

My own view is securely in the former camp but the beauty of Jukka-Pekka Saraste's July 2017 Cologne performance is that it doesn't take sides. Saraste lays Brahms's cards on the table rather than his own, so that the first movement's exposition (played here with its important repeat intact) banks into the development section on the wings of a question, having not previously suffered distracting knots in the musical line or, worse, a tempo that's too slow. What you hear is beautiful, flowing, fairly formal, nicely shaped and, above all, inwardly gentle, though that's not to say that the performance lacks backbone. Great too that the first movement's coda is kept on the move and that the *Adagio*'s opening paragraphs have an earnestness about them as well as a sense of intimacy that runs parallel through the best of Brahms's chamber music. The unfolding modulations from 4'33" and the exquisite way they're orchestrated is tellingly interpreted (listen from 5'57" and note the beautiful transition into the violin melody).

The *Allegretto* marks an effective lightening of mood – again, Saraste's tempo is very well chosen – and the sensitively inflected finale has an appropriate 'outdoorsy' quality to it, exhilarating rather than excessively hard-driven. The *Haydn* Variations are also treated to a well-judged interpretation, their constituent parts as transparent as those in the symphony. Symphonies Nos 1 and 3 in this series (8/13) are similarly compelling – there's a nice rise and fall to No 1's phrasing though no first-movement repeat – so if No 4 proves to be as good this should become a Brahms cycle to reckon with. **Rob Cowan**

Britten • Hindemith

Britten Violin Concerto, Op 15

Hindemith Violin Concerto

Arabella Steinbacher vn Berlin Radio

Symphony Orchestra / Vladimir Jurowski

Pentatone (F) PTC5186 625 (65' • DDD/DSF)



If the most common coupling for Britten's Violin Concerto is more Britten – most obviously the Piano Concerto, as for Mark Lubotsky with the composer – it has been paired with a bewildering array of works by others: Beethoven, Ben-Haim, Berg, Milhaud, Stravinsky and Walton among others. I do not recall a pairing of it with Hindemith's, which is odd, since both were completed in 1939.

Arabella Steinbacher's sweet, opulent tone is prominent throughout these carefully manicured accounts, and her partnership with Jurowski seems made in heaven. They enter a crowded field for the Britten: Presto Classical's website lists 37 rivals. Pentatone's sumptuous, beautiful sound is a plus compared to Lubotsky (Decca, 8/71) and Vengerov (Warner, 7/03), while Jurowski's pacing – noticeably slower than usual in the opening paragraph – and handling of the orchestral detail is well judged. If Steinbacher lacks Vengerov's electric virtuosity, I warmed to her account more than to his undeniably fascinating one. However, she cannot quite match Mordkovitch's more searching interpretation (coupled with Veale's wonderful concerto – Chandos, 9/01) nor Marwood's highly recommendable all-Britten competitor (Hyperion, 3/12).

Much will depend on couplings, and the Hindemith makes this unique. Again, the composer's account (with David Oistrakh – Decca, 2/63) is a leading contender, although Frank Peter Zimmermann's, coupled with four sonatas (BIS, 9/13), remains my top recommendation. Steinbacher has the measure of the work and her sense of personal connection is manifest throughout; her father knew Hindemith and worked with him on a staging of *Die Harmonie der Welt*. Steinbacher's rapport with the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra is also more in tune (in all senses) than Midori's was in Frankfurt (Ondine, 11/13). All here audibly relish Hindemith's love of orchestral sonorities. If not the first choice for either work, then, Steinbacher's is an excellent alternative. **Guy Rickards**

Chadwick · Elgar

**Chadwick Symphonic Sketches Elgar Variations
on an Original Theme, 'Enigma', Op 36
BBC National Orchestra of Wales /
Andrew Constantine
Orchid (F) ORC100074 (65' • DDD)**



Let me urge
immediate
investigation of
George Whitefield

Chadwick's *Symphonic Sketches* (1895-1904), four colourful tableaux of red-blooded vigour, fresh-faced charm and memorable invention (there's a peach of a secondary idea in the exuberant opening 'Jubilee'). Throughout Chadwick displays a notably deft orchestral touch; listen out for some especially rewarding writing for

cor anglais in the tenderly nostalgic No 2 ('Noël') and bass clarinet in the roistering No 4 ('A Vagrom Ballad'). There's also plenty of twinkling humour to savour – and do I even detect a couple of mischievous nods to Brahms's *Academic Festival Overture* in No 3 ('Hobgoblin')? Andrew Constantine leads a performance of winning affection and attentive spirit; he also secures a commendably spick-and-span response from the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, who seem to be enjoying making this music's acquaintance. The Hoddinott Hall sound has satisfying amplitude and truthful perspective in its favour but lacks something in ambient warmth by the side of Keith Johnson's lustrous efforts in Brno for José Serebrier (an unmissable tonic on Reference Recordings, 4/95).

It seems Chadwick was somewhat ambivalent about the international acclaim that greeted Elgar after the phenomenal success of masterpieces like the *Enigma* Variations and *The Dream of Gerontius*. (Following a meeting between the two in London in 1906, Chadwick wrote: 'Had a very jolly and interesting visit ... but I am not quite prepared to recognise him as the great genius that his cult would make him out.') In its thoughtful manners and painstaking preparation, Constantine's *Enigma* has not a little in common with Martyn Brabbins's BBC Scottish SO version (Hyperion, 10/16). He's particularly effective at pointing up the contrast between the delicate poise of 'Dorabella' and whiplash energy of 'GRS'. Plaudits must also go to the BBC NOW's principal clarinet Robert Plane for some magically hushed playing in the 'Romanza'. On the debit side, both 'Nimrod' and 'BGN' are a fraction too inflated for my own tastes. Ultimately, I do miss those boundless reserves of compassion, humanity and vulnerability (to say nothing of the entrancing flow and organic inevitability) that mark out the greatest *Enigmas* (Barbirolli and Monteux, from 1956 and 1958 respectively, would still be my own top choices).

No matter, the disc earns a welcome for the sake of the Chadwick alone. I should add that Constantine himself pens a fascinating booklet essay, finding plenty of intriguing comparisons and points of contact between these two near-contemporaries. **Andrew Achenbach**

Haydn

**Violin Concertos - No 1; No 3; No 4
Lisa Jacobs *vn* The String Soloists
Cobra © COBRA0061 (68' • DDD)**



Lisa Jacobs fields a band of no more than 14 string players, with a very present harpsichord accompaniment. Ensemble and phrasing are ideal, and Jacobs's own cadenzas are in keeping with their surroundings. Her tone is clear and consistent. What is missing, perhaps, is that strand of individuality that marked out her Locatelli disc last year. It's almost as if she's playing safe, notwithstanding having explored these works in depth while touring them over the past season.

The bicentenary year in 2009, commemorating Haydn's death, was a turning point in the performance of his music. Since then we've had the completion of the first period-instrument cycle of his symphonies plus the continuation of Thomas Fey's ever-individual recordings and the start of a new survey by Il Giardino Armonico and Giovanni Antonini. Period and period-influenced traversals of these concertos also have a long history – Simon Standage's readings with the English Concert are now 30 years old, and subsequently we've had Elizabeth Wallfisch, Giuliano Carmignola, Midori Seiler and more. All demonstrate a new, contemporary approach to Haydn-playing, which, I'm afraid, Lisa Jacobs and The String Soloists don't quite. If you already have a favourite, stick to that. **David Threasher**

Mahler

Symphony No 2, 'Resurrection'

Chen Reiss sop Karen Cargill mez Netherlands
Radio Choir; Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra
Daniele Gatti

RCO Live (M) ②  RCO17003; (F)  RCO17109;
(F)  RCO17108 (88' • DDD/DSD • NTSC • 16.9 •
1080p • Euro-3D 9.0 • DTS-HD MA5.0, DD5.0 &
LPCM stereo • 0 • T/t)
Recorded live, September 18, 2016

19. *Leucosia* (Leucosia) *leucostoma* (Fabricius)



As Mahler symphonies have become better and better known over

the years, so too has the pressure grown on his interpreters to rekindle their 'newness', their ability to surprise and shock. I have nothing but the highest regard for Daniele Gatti and his magnificent Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, steeped as they are in a long and distinguished Mahler tradition, but what is most impressive about this account of the Second Symphony is also that which sometimes makes it wanting in intrigue and excitement. The risks Mahler took so often and so readily – exaggerating as he did all the trappings of Austro-German symphonic music – are here so well honed as to render them, if not benign, then certainly less startling and threatening than they might be.

You know immediately from the outset of the first movement that Gatti is meticulous in his observation: the full value of that suspenseful tremolando between upheavals in cellos and basses is scrupulously observed. But how nerve-racking does it feel? And should there be more abandon in those seismic cellos and basses? When the second subject is revealed in full the second time around, doesn't Mahler want it to arrive much more cautiously from the mists of time? He does ask for precisely that feeling – and when he asks he has the best possible reasons for doing so. You cannot 'normalise' or short-change Mahler's flights of fancy in any way.

Gatti makes much of the creepy, slow marching basses at the start of the approach to the big development climax but despite the promise of big contrasts to come, as suggested by his writ-large ritardandos, the gradual headlong dash to the abyss (not headlong enough) doesn't begin to convey the recklessness of the music with the ensuing – and shocking – *molto pesante* not nearly pronounced enough at the arrival of those shattering discords.

But then again, the long, reflective, rather 'sentimental' passage for strings just prior to the coda is vintage

Concertgebouw – very beautiful. As is the homely *Andante* Minuet of the second movement, where the turbulent middle section for once comes as a real surprise. An interrupted idyll. Again, though, there needs to be more of a sardonic edge to the third movement and a touch of 'cheesiness' to the close-harmony trumpets of the Trio which Gatti, with no relaxing of the tempo, makes far too 'tasteful' to my mind.

Karen Cargill's engagement is characteristically total in the 'Urlicht', where she and Gatti quite swiftly but eloquently maintain the line, resisting the temptation to 'do a Bernstein' on the song. I love, too, the distancing of the trumpets (how many don't observe this) at the start and the heartbreaking oboe-playing.

Watching Gatti on the DVD highlights his attention to detail, not least in the manner of phrasings and dynamics, and he is totally in command of the superstructure in the 'Judgement Day' finale. But here again I would question one crucial choice. The great 'march of the undead' is almost Klemperer-like in its deliberation; and, like Klemperer in that famous (but in my view very flawed) recording, it puts grandeur ahead of scarifying impetus. But, that said, the maniacal offstage band really does get appreciably closer and the Concertgebouw trombones are pretty terrifying in that tumultuous last-ditch climax.

Gatti's expansiveness is key to his reading of this last movement; and from the flute's songful bird of paradise and the heart-stopping entry of the chorus right through to his sensationally slow peroration (a leaf from Bernstein's book here), I have no problem with it. It sounds marvellous and is, as ever, glorious in its cumulative effect. You could argue that the last 20 minutes of this symphony are pretty much conductor-proof. But then I turn to Vladimir Jurowski's London Philharmonic live performance and the euphoric uplift of the final pages comes as a revelation once

more. That's the version that repeatedly surprises and astonishes me the most.

Edward Seckerson

Selected comparison:

LPO, Jurowski (8/11) (LPO) LPO0054

Mathias

Piano Concertos – No 2, Op 13^a; No 3, Op 40^b.

Ceremony After a Fire Raid, Op 63^c

^aWilliam Mathias, ^cChris Williams, ^aLlŷr Williams pf

^cAndrea Porter, ^aMatt Hardy perc BBC National

^cChorus and ^aOrchestra of Wales / ^aGrant

Llewellyn, ^cAdrian Partington; ^bBBC Symphony Orchestra / Moshe Atzmon

Tŷ Cerdd (F) TCRO16 (69' • ^bADD/^aDDD)

Recorded live at ^bBrangwyn Hall, Swansea,

October 15, 1968; ^aBBC Hoddinott Hall, Cardiff,

^aJune 7, 2014, ^cNovember 15, 2015



William Mathias didn't seem to have much, if any, interest in working anywhere near the musical cutting edge, yet there's something about his 1973 setting of Dylan Thomas's 'Ceremony After a Fire Raid' that seems very much of its time. The chorus not only sing but whisper and chant, occasionally suggesting the indignation of a mob; piano and percussion add to the atmosphere of community ritual. I doubt, too, if Mathias ever wrote anything with a darker harmonic palette, although the clouds do part at the end for a joyous, dancing celebration that glances ahead to the Royal Wedding anthem, his best-known work. *Ceremony* was written for solo voices but is performed here by a large choir, and the added heft is dramatically effective, particularly in such a fervent performance.

Both of the piano concertos have been recorded before. Llŷr Williams gives an affectionate, able-fingered account of the Second – but then so does Mark Bebbington (Somm, 12/11). Both are

primephonic

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a tad stodgy in the Scherzo but are otherwise persuasive advocates for a finely crafted, attractive score. As for the Third Concerto, it was vividly recorded by Peter Katin (the composer's piano teacher at the RAM) in 1971 and reissued alongside the concertos for harp and clarinet in what remains the best single-disc introduction to Mathias's orchestral music (Lyrita, 7/95). What we have here is a broadcast recording by the composer made in Swansea with the BBC SO when the work was brand new. The sound is problematic but the performance is so thrilling one can easily forgive the sonic deficiencies. Mathias was clearly a terrific pianist and drives the first movement hard, giving a gripping sense of urgency and grit. The slow movement flows more easily than in Katin's version and the scherzo-like section at its centre bursts in with stunning ferocity. What's most illuminating here is the way Mathias unifies the eclectic elements of his music; there's no feeling of the episodic or patched-together. It all sounds inevitable in his hands. So heartfelt thanks to Ty Cerd for publishing this invaluable document. Certainly anyone with any interest in Mathias's work should hear it.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Medtner · Rachmaninov

Medtner Piano Concerto No 1, Op 33^a. Prologue, 'The Angel', Op 1 No 1 Rachmaninov Piano Concerto No 2, Op 18^a. Prelude, Op 23 No 4 Jayson Gillham pf^a Melbourne Symphony Orchestra / Benjamin Northey ABC Classics Ⓜ ABC481 5564 (73' • DDD)



It is partly the constantly changing and complex rhythms that have contributed to the comparative neglect of Medtner's three piano concertos. That, their rhapsodic nature and the lack of memorable melodies. Australian-born, London-based Jayson Gillham confesses that he and the Melbourne orchestra did not know the C minor Concerto before being asked to learn it for a documentary which would follow 'my journey as I prepared, performed and then recorded the work. This recording', he tells us, 'is the culmination of that process.'

Very fine it is, too, with tempos pretty close to the composer's recording, and, so far as I can see, the only version coupled with Rachmaninov's C minor currently available. I'm surprised it is not done more often. I am also surprised that the booklet note on the concerto by the pianist Dmitri

Alexeev is word-for-word the same essay (slightly shortened) that he wrote for his own 1994 recording of the work for Hyperion (3/95).

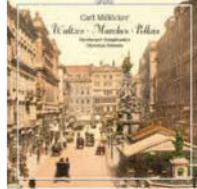
If a sequence of two concertos in the same key should concern you, Jayson Gillham has inserted a 'Prologue' (in E major), the opening number of *Acht Stimmungsbilder*, Medtner's first published work (1897). The score quotes the opening lines of Lermontov's poem 'The Angel' which the composer later set for voice and piano using the same melody.

Turning to the ubiquitous and much-loved C minor Concerto of Rachmaninov, Gillham offers a perfectly respectable but ultimately unremarkable account, closer in tempos to the young Ashkenazy and Kondrashin than to the faster composer or, by contrast, Richter. There is a well-judged balance between soloist and orchestra, allowing us to hear some of the piano's passagework with uncommon clarity. The Melbourne Symphony Orchestra are also fine but not yet world class, and I found the nasal trumpets unattractively assertive. Gillham ends the disc with Rachmaninov's sublime nocturne-like D major Prelude, beautifully done, as one would expect from a pupil of Christopher Elton. Jeremy Nicholas

Millöcker

'Waltzes · Marches · Polkas'
Overture in E flat. Ida - Polka française.
Cyprienne - Polka schnell. Sonntagskind-Walzer
nach Motiven der Operette 'Das Sonntagskind'.
Melitta - Polka mazurka. Apajune-Marsch nach
Motiven der Operette 'Apajune, der
Wassermann'. Probekuss-Walzer nach Motiven
der Operette 'Der Probekuss'. Eilgut-Galopp
nach Motiven der Operette 'Nordlicht'.
Ringstrassen-Polka aus der Musik zur Posse 'Der
Untaugliche'. Carnevalslaunen - Polka schnell.
Der Bettelstudent - Overture. Pizzicato-Walzer.
Quecksilber - Polka schnell
Nuremberg Symphony Orchestra /
Christian Simonis

CPO Ⓜ CPO555 004-2 (65' • DDD)



For a composer of some of the most easy-going music in history, Carl Millöcker appears to have been a tricky customer. He was fired from the Theater an der Wien for quarrelling with both singers and orchestra only three months after being appointed a conductor there in the spring of 1866. That autumn he moved to the Harmony Theatre, falling on his sword the following year after a major scrap with a singer.

If you wouldn't detect an irksome personality from Millöcker's free-flowing music, what you can trace is his musical provenance as a flautist. In the 'French polka' *Ida* he spins a long and delicious line from a small, uneventful musical germ. His themes are often similarly tender but also indistinct, with the possible exception of one of the four waltz themes that breaks out of *The Sunday Child Waltz*, based on themes from the operetta of the same name.

Otherwise, it's easy to hear how Millöcker became one of the central figures of the Viennese operetta scene (he eventually got his job at the Theater an der Wien back) but remains largely forgotten today: he knew how to write 'by numbers'. Listening to him dip into his box of tricks across 13 tracks for a whole hour is an odd experience, especially given the relative textural heaviness of much of this light music.

But it does have a sense of charm in the right hands. We know that playing a waltz isn't easy (Vladimir Jurowski once said that the hardest opera he took charge of at Glyndebourne was *Die Fledermaus*) and there are occasions on which that very idiosyncratic counting required seems to elude this German orchestra. At least they sound like they're having fun under Christian Simonis. Andrew Mellor

Prokofiev

Violin Concerto No 2, Op 63^a. Solo Violin Sonata, Op 115^b. Five Melodies, Op 35bis^c. The Love for Three Oranges - March (arr Heifetz)^c. Piano Sonata No 4 - Andante, Op 29bis^d

^aabc Rosanne Philippens vn ^cJulien Quentin pf

^dad St Gallen Symphony Orchestra / Otto Tausk

Channel Classics Ⓜ CCS39517 (65' • DDD)



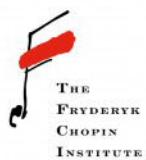
At the heart of this curiously planned miscellany is Prokofiev's G minor Violin Concerto, one of the last scores he completed to non-Soviet order, although it may equally indicate his desire to reconnect with the wider audience at home. Consistent with his quest for a 'new simplicity', earlier recordings tended to make the work sound seamless, whether fleet and fluid (Jascha Heifetz), generously direct (David Oistrakh) or impulsively lyrical (Kyung-Wha Chung). More recent champions on the other hand look for discontinuities, that vaguely Spanish finale no longer a celebration of local colour so much as a portent of horrors shortly to be unleashed. The concerto was premiered on December 1, 1935, in Madrid. Whatever

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you make of this, the score has never been more popular in the recording studio and Rosanne Philippens celebrates her 30th birthday with yet another fine version that deserves a hearing, without necessarily trumping its predecessors.

Her most obvious rival is Janine Jansen and not just because of shared nationality. Their recordings feature the same instrument, the 'Barrère' Stradivarius previously on loan to Jansen, who speaks warmly of her young compatriot in the accompanying booklet. Heard back to back, Philippens seems marginally less assured, compensating with a markedly individualistic take on tempo, nuance and timbre. Rivals, Jansen included, make the music feel more cogent but the switch to melting sweetness works beautifully in the second subject of the first movement, a tune that seems to come straight out of *Romeo and Juliet*. Then again, you might find Philippens's treatment of the second movement's opening arioso a little too gloopy. At the very end of the finale, her spirited dialogue disappoints only because the minatory bass drum is balanced rather discreetly in the generous acoustic. Jansen has the advantage of Vladimir Jurowski's London Philharmonic and closer miking.

Like Viktoria Mullova in her recent remake, Philippens also plays Prokofiev's Solo Violin Sonata of 1947, albeit with a freedom belying its origins as music designed for massed ranks of violin students. Next it's back to the inter-war years for the *Five Melodies*, characterfully communicated with the support of the French-born pianist Julien Quentin. The March from *The Love for Three Oranges* in Heifetz's brief arrangement is an unexpected addition, though not as unexpected as the final bonus, Prokofiev's purely orchestral transcription of the *Andante* from the Fourth Piano Sonata made in the early 1930s. Neeme Järvi's idiomatically glowering Chandos alternative is more conventionally coupled with similar rarities in physical format.

David Gutman

Concerto, Solo Sonata – selected comparison:

Mullova, Frankfurt RSO, P Järvi
(10/15) (ONYX) ONYX412

Concerto – selected comparison:

Jansen, LPO, Jurowski (1/13) (DECC) 478 3546DH

Andante – selected comparison:

RSNO, N Järvi (3/90^R) (CHAN) CHAN10486

Prokofiev · Weinberg

Prokofiev Symphony No 5, Op 100

Weinberg Symphony No 5, Op 76

Polish Sinfonia Iuventus Orchestra /

Gabriel Chmura

Warner Classics ® ② 9029 58127-1 (91' · DDD)



Why re-record Weinberg's Fifth? Well, it is certainly a standout piece in his output of 26 symphonies, constantly astonishing by its lyrical and rhythmic inventiveness, its mastery of transition and the subtlety of its moods. I can also understand why Chmura might want to give the young players (all under 30) of Sinfonia Iuventus the chance to advocate it, and indeed why he might find three of Weinberg's four as yet unrecorded symphonies – Nos 9, 11 and 15 – ideologically unpalatable because of their pro-Soviet ideological orientation. However, 14 years on from his Chandos account there is no drastic difference in terms of Chmura's interpretation of the Fifth, so this does feel like something of a lost opportunity. The first movement is admittedly a little tighter and some rhythms are more precisely etched, while Chmura's empathy with the slower movements remains as perceptive as before. However, Kondrashin's more sharply contoured approach to the overall drama – by turns more mysterious, fiercer and more dangerous – throws into relief the painful search for composure in the slow movement and finale that I find a good deal more compelling.

As for the Prokofiev, its ultra-smooth opening commands respect, and once again all the textures are carefully shaped and precisely placed. But the downside is that the music never quite takes wing, and there is simply more at stake in human terms in Karajan's reading – hear the menace he brings to the first-movement coda, for instance, over and above Chmura's broadening and amplification (the same goes for the darker phases of the slow movement). Similarly, the Scherzo feels a little too laid back, especially in its second theme, and though it does develop considerable verve in the later stages, there is always more dash and élan from Karajan's Berliners and Gergiev's Londoners. Most conspicuously, the finale feels unduly reined in throughout and the hyperventilating coda, though fast enough, sounds tame by comparison with starrier rivals, Karajan above all. **David Fanning**

Weinberg – comparative versions:

Polish Nat RSO, Chmura (2/04) (CHAN) CHAN10128

Moscow PO, Kondrashin (MELO) MELCD100 2281

Prokofiev – selected comparisons:

BPO, Karajan (6/69^R) (DG)

437 253-2GGA or 463 613-2GOR

LSO, Gergiev (6/06) (PHIL) 475 7655PM4

Ravel

Daphnis et Chloé^a. Une barque sur l'océan.

Pavane pour une infante défunte

WDR Radio Choir, Cologne; Luxembourg

Philharmonic Orchestra / Gustavo Gimeno

Pentatone F PTC5186 652 (73' · DDD/DSD)



It's unfortunate, perhaps, that Gustavo Gimeno's new Pentatone recording

of *Daphnis et Chloé* should appear so soon after François-Xavier Roth's version with Les Siècles for Harmonia Mundi, much admired in these pages and elsewhere when it was released earlier this year. Using conventional rather than period instruments, Gimeno's performance does, indeed, have much to recommend it. It's a coolly sensual account, for the most part beautifully played by his Luxembourg orchestra. There's a laid-back, languorous feel to much of it. Gimeno lingers over the lovers' rapt kiss after the dancing contest, and the Pan-Syrinx Pantomime, the flute solo done with wonderful poise, is all the more exquisite for being taken slowly. String textures are warm yet fastidiously teased out without quite equalling Roth's transparency. Lycéion's clarinets are sinewy and provocative, spelling out real danger. Gimeno has a fine chorus in Cologne's WDR Radio Choir, hushed and mysterious-sounding, very different from Roth's brighter, more open-vowelled Ensemble Aedes.

Heady though it is, however, the sensuousness sometimes comes at the price of the score's menace and élan. Dorcon's 'Danse grotesque' sounds a bit too polite and the Pirates' first incursion isn't as threatening as it might be.

The 'Danse guerrière' and the final 'Bacchanale' impress with their precision – the brass are terrific – but don't really take us to Dionysian extremes. Roth is altogether more exciting here, though to get the full measure of what can be done with the closing pages, you need, perhaps, to turn to Charles Dutoit's 1981 Montreal performance on Decca, where orchestral virtuosity and breakneck speeds result in something uniquely overwhelming.

Gimeno's fillers are attractive: the ominous beauty of *Une barque sur l'océan* is deftly captured; the refined grace and melancholy elegance of *Pavane pour une infante défunte* are finely judged. **Tim Ashley**

Daphnis et Chloé – selected comparisons:

Montreal SO, Dutoit (6/81^R) (DECC) 475 6891

Siècles, Roth (6/17) (HARM) HMM90 5280



Light and graceful: Alexis Kossenko and Les Ambassadeurs bring a Classical refinement to Italian Baroque flute concertos

Saint-Saëns

Symphony No 3, 'Organ', Op 78^a

Carnaval des animaux^b

Martha Argerich pf **Daniele Rossi** org

Orchestra of the Accademia Nazionale

di Santa Cecilia / **Sir Antonio Pappano** bpf

Warner Classics  9029 57555-5 (61' • DDD)

^aRecorded live at the Sala Santa Cecilia, Rome, April 4 & 7-9, 2016



Saint-Saëns's *Organ* Symphony and *The Carnival of the Animals* are rarely paired

together on disc. Hugely different in scale, they have little in common other than being composed in the same year – simultaneously – but are probably the composer's two most famous works. This seems justification enough for Antonio Pappano to couple them on this disc in which his Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia are joined by Martha Argerich as a very special guest in Saint-Saëns's 'zoological fantasy'.

The *Organ* Symphony was recorded in concert before quite a restless Roman audience. Pappano's orchestra pack a punch but their reading is quite measured, even when compared with Charles Dutoit

and his Montreal SO. The first movement is emphatic and weighty, while the second – at over 11 minutes – feels lugubrious. Organist Daniele Rossi gently underscores the orchestra in the *Poco adagio* – Saint-Saëns never meant this as an organ showpiece but a symphony 'with organ'. The *Allegro moderato* feels as if it scampers along but it's all relative; Dutoit is a good 30 seconds swifter. The organ features strongly in the finale but doesn't obliterate everything in its wake. Applause is retained.

The close recording of *The Carnival of the Animals* comes as a shock after the panoramic sound picture for the symphony but Pappano's menagerie is well caricatured and this is a fun performance. Hens peck insistently, the gruff staccato of the double bass paints a jolly elephant and the persons with long ears – critics? – bray energetically. Argerich and Pappano have tremendous fun as a pair of hesitant, apologetic amateur pianists, and their aquarium ripples and swirls hypnotically. Recording levels are disconcerting though – *fortes* are aggressive, the xylophone rattles fiercely in 'Fossils' and it sounds as if the avian flute is nesting in the right-hand speaker. A fun trip to the zoo, though, but I'm less convinced about the coupling. **Mark Pullinger**

Sammartini · Tartini · Vivaldi

'Soave e virtuoso'

Sammartini Soprano Recorder Concerto

Tartini Flute Concertos – G291; G293; G294

Vivaldi Recorder Concerto, RV441. Soprano

Recorder Concerto, RV443

Alexis Kossenko fl/rec **Les Ambassadeurs**

Apárté  AP156 (82' • DDD)



One would be hard-pressed to find a flautist whose music-making is as broad as Alexis Kossenko's. Active on both modern flute, Baroque transverse flute and recorder, his concert and recording soloist activities spread the gamut from Telemann to Nielsen. Then there's his work as a conductor, guesting with the likes of B'Rock and Le Concert d'Astrée, but most importantly directing his co-stars on this latest disc, *Les Ambassadeurs*, the historical instrument ensemble he founded in 2010.

All of which means that, while 'sweet and virtuoso' could frankly be the title of any Baroque flute concertos recording, Kossenko's presence alone warrants an interested look at its contents. It's a typical Kossenko affair, too, in terms of the range of flutes his programme

requires, its Tartini backbone scored for transverse flute but Vivaldi's perennially popular RV443 and the Sammartini F major Concerto being soprano recorder works, and Vivaldi's RV441 for alto recorder. Still, impressive and tonally varied as this horizontal and vertical buffet is, it's the Tartini that's of most interest, simply because the Sammartini and Vivaldi works are already so often recorded (and indeed personally I enjoyed the greater tempo contrasts recently brought to the Sammartini by Maurice Steger on his 'Souvenirs d'Italie' – Harmonia Mundi, 2/17).

The Tartini concertos, on the other hand, are far lesser-spotted, not least because they're transcriptions of what were really solo violin works, albeit contemporaneously arranged. Furthermore, they appear here in beautifully rendered form, their many ornamentations smoothly and almost imperceptibly brought off in the up-tempo outer movements and tangibly augmenting the slow movements' emotional affective weight. Les Ambassadeurs meanwhile are light and graceful of footprint, soft and smooth of attack and texture (in fact *nota bene* that it's Classical-style refinement rather than full-on Baroque bristle, even in Vivaldi's RV443), and interpretationally glued to Kossenko's side.

So, while I'm beginning to think there should be a recording amnesty on those Vivaldi and Sammartini concertos, the Tartini might well be worth your coin.

Charlotte Gardner

Scriabin

Piano Concerto, Op 20^a. Symphony No 2, Op 29

^aKirill Gerstein pf

Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra / Vasily Petrenko

LAWO (F) LWC1139 (77' • DDD)



While Scriabin's Second Symphony is arguably the most conventional of his

five from a melodic and harmonic standpoint, it's not a work that plays itself. In the central *Andante*, for instance, a conductor has to determine tempos that bring out the music's expansive lyrical nature while preventing it from rambling. And do we treat what Scriabin called his 'military parade' finale as a cumulative extension of what came before, or simply let rip and bait the audience? Or both, if possible? Suffice it to say that the Oslo Philharmonic and their chief conductor

Vasily Petrenko brilliantly navigate these challenges, and thereby raise the work's interpretative bar on disc for vivid detailing, clear yet voluptuous textures, and taking the composer's expressive directives seriously.

The first movement is a case in point, where the undulating string accompaniments supporting the excellent first-desk solos are appropriately billowy yet rhythmically defined. Dovetailing directly into the second-movement *Allegro*, Petrenko and his musicians bring lithe, forward-moving ensemble unity to the first theme and the final peroration, as well as shapely contouring of slower, more exposed passages (such as the one for clarinet and strings about 7'07" into the movement). Although the aforementioned third-movement *Andante* times out to more than 18 minutes (compared to Muti/Philadelphia's 13, for example), Petrenko's linear trajectory generates a sense of tension and release that consistently holds your attention; the deliciously scurrying woodwinds in the movement's first few minutes alone signify felicities up ahead. While the tempestuous fourth movement doesn't quite match Golovschin's Naxos version for unbridled sizzle, the Oslo players' superiority on all levels compensates, and the finale's transparent orchestral strands and playful demeanour cut through the conventional bluster.

In the Concerto's first movement, soloist Kirill Gerstein and the orchestra largely interact in a chamber-like manner; the soloist is not afraid to pull back and accompany when others have the big tunes. He takes the thicker, full-bodied chordal climaxes in symphonic stride, rather than italicising them, channelling his considerable virtuosity towards the bigger musical picture. At the same time, I miss the wider dynamic range and palette of characterisation distinguishing Vladimir Ashkenazy's benchmark recording, notably in the second-movement variations. To cite just one example, notice Gerstein's straightforward transitional measure into the *Allegro scherzando* second variation and the supple yet soft-grained edge to that variation's piano/orchestra interplay. By contrast, Ashkenazy personalises and dramatises the transition, followed by a faster-paced variation where the orchestra's interjectory flourishes cut through with far more impact. The finale fares best; here the polished synchronicity between Gerstein and Petrenko gains considerable dynamism along the lines of the recent Sudbin/Litton/Bergen recording. To sum up the performances: the concerto is memorable, the symphony is indispensable. **Jed Distler**

Symphony – selected comparisons:

Philadelphia Orch, Muti

(11/90^a, 3/02) (EMI/WARN) 567720-2

Moscow SO, Golovschin (2/97) (NAXO) 8 553581

Piano Concerto – selected comparison:

Sudbin, Bergen PO, Litton (3/15) (BIS) BIS2088

Shostakovich

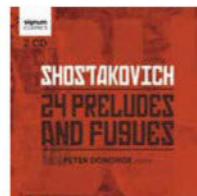
Piano Concertos – No 1, Op 35^a; No 2, Op 102^b

Piano Sonatas – No 1, Op 12; No 2, Op 61

Peter Donohoe pf^a Hugh Davies tpt

ab Orchestra of the Swan / David Curtis

Signum (F) SIGCD493 (80' • DDD)



What a sensible idea to programme both of Shostakovich's concertos with the two piano sonatas, with the early First Sonata getting a rare outing on disc. Shostakovich was just 20 when he wrote it – 12-plus minutes of sheer intensity. Donohoe is an assured and sympathetic guide through its sometimes gnarly textures, encapsulating both its moments of heightened

Scriabin-esque writing and its Prokofievian energy. In his hands, the intensity never sags and he patently relishes its bravado ending. Shostakovich's piano teacher Leonid Nikolayev was nonplussed by it: 'a sonata for metronome to the accompaniment of piano' was his pithy verdict. Yet Shostakovich clearly forgave him, for the Second Sonata of 1943 is an *in memoriam* to his teacher. Donohoe captures the quiet desperation that underpins much of the lean-textured opening *Allegro*. There's no room to hide in this piece, and occasionally I wanted more palpable beauty in the grave slow movement, but in the variation-form finale, which begins so unassumingly, Donohoe relishes Shostakovich's occasional bursts of more energetic writing without losing sight of its essentially elegiac tone.

For the two concertos, he's joined by the Orchestra of the Swan. He's perhaps more at home in the First Concerto, with stylish trumpet-playing from the under-credited Hugh Davies. Together they find the right degree of jokiness without exaggeration in the outer movements. But the competition is tough and Melnikov has a secret weapon in the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, who are tremendously alive to the colours conjured by Shostakovich, while Hamelin has a lightness of touch that is very infectious. In the slow movement, Donohoe sounds almost prosaic alongside Melnikov's caressing way with the piano phrases. And let's not forget Argerich's extraordinary account of this piece, superbly, wildly impetuous in the best possible manner.

In the Second Concerto, Donohoe is particularly convincing in the outer movements, his colossal technique put to good use in the taut, brilliant finale. In the slow movement, though, again, he doesn't find the same yearning quality that makes Melnikov's reading so irresistible.

Harriet Smith

Piano Concertos – selected comparisons:

Hamelin, BBC Scottish SO, Litton

(1/04) (HYPE) CDA67425

Melnikov, Mahler CO, Currentzis

(5/12) (HARM) HMC90 2104

Concerto No 1 – selected comparison:

Argerich, Nakariakov, Svizzera Italiana Orch, Vedernikov

(11/07) (EMI) 504504-2

Tchaikovsky

The Sleeping Beauty, Op 66

State Academic Symphony Orchestra of Russia 'Evgeny Svetlanov' /

Vladimir Jurowski

ICA Classics ① ② ICAC5144 (160' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Tchaikovsky Concert Hall,

Moscow, December 30, 2013



If you ever doubted that, beneath his steely gaze, Vladimir Jurowski has a keen

sense of humour, skip immediately to 'Puss-in-Boots and the White Cat' on this new recording of *The Sleeping Beauty*. The descending oboe phrases bend nicely enough, but just wait until the cor anglais's feline response, purring, miaowing and all but rubbing up against your legs. It's a laugh-out-loud moment and confirmed – not that I'd really needed winning around – that this is a terrific recording.

Jurowski's Tchaikovsky is familiar on disc, both with the London Philharmonic Orchestra (the symphonies) and the Russian National Orchestra (Suite No 3 and *Hamlet* incidental music) but here he conducts the State Academic Symphony Orchestra of Russia 'Evgeny Svetlanov' ... which is quite a mouthful of a title! Essentially it is the orchestra founded in 1936 as the USSR State Symphony, the Svetlanov sobriquet added in 2005 to honour its former chief conductor who recorded so much with it on the state label, Melodiya.

It's an excellent band, retaining some of the earthy, brazen quality from its Soviet days, especially when compared against Mikhail Pletnev's ultra-refined RNO on their superb DG set. Where Pletnev revels in the filigree orchestral glitter and detail of the score, Jurowski prefers to emphasise the symphonic nature of Tchaikovsky's

ballet. The opening chords of the Prologue in this concert recording reach for the dramatic jugular. The playing is bold and red-blooded – not as quick as Neeme Järvi's mad dash with the Bergen Philharmonic but often just as exciting.

The 'Svetlanov' band offer vivid characterisations: clarinets squeal and squirm as Carabosse gatecrashes Aurora's christening; string pizzicatos are executed with pinpoint precision as the fairy scattering breadcrumbs; and Sergey Girshenko's silky violin surges and swells in the Act 2 Vision scene. Husky double basses act as a sturdy foundation, throatily driving the action. Jurowski injects the ceremonial numbers with plenty of pomp and ensures an organic flow to the wonderful 'Rose Adage'. This is livelier, grittier playing than Pletnev and the RNO and it's very persuasive. Järvi whips his Bergen orchestra through the score a good five minutes faster, arguably too fast for some, but Jurowski can be just as exhilarating.

There is precision and brilliance in the Act 3 Wedding divertissement which, as Jurowski points out in a booklet interview, is different in character to the rest of the score, looking forwards, in many ways, to Stravinsky. The fairy-tale characters bristle with life, from Red Riding Hood and the

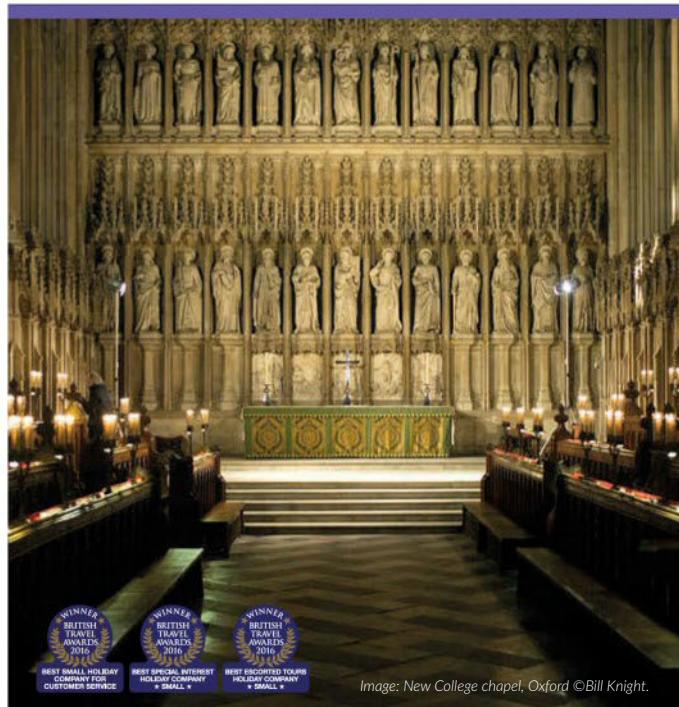


Image: New College chapel, Oxford ©Bill Knight.

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Mark Pullinger

Selected comparisons:

Russian Nat Orch, Pletnev

(7/99⁸) (DG) 477 5153GB5 or 477 9788GM2

Bergen PO, N Järvi (1/13) (CHAN) CHSA5113

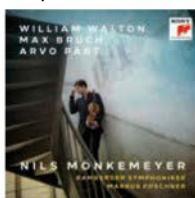
Walton · Bruch · Pärt

Bruch Kol Nidrei, Op 47. Romance, Op 85

Pärt Fratres **Walton** Viola Concerto

Nils Mönkemeyer v/o **Bamberg Symphony Orchestra / Markus Poschner**

Sony Classical (F) 88985 36019-2 (59' · DDD)



When it comes to Walton's Viola Concerto, surely the finest and most original of his string concertos, perhaps Markus Poschner's Bamberg opening is just a little too reserved (although muted, violins and violas are marked *forte*), but the solo part is marked *piano* and that's precisely how Nils Mönkemeyer performs it. Still, for me, both Maxim Vengerov with Rostropovich (Warner, 7/03) and Lars Anders Tomter with Paul Daniel (Naxos, 5/96) strike a more effective balance, even though the *sforzando* surges as cued by Poschner are played as written.

As the movement progresses, so the mood intensifies, and the skilfully wrought components of Walton's marvellous score are extremely well captured by Sony's engineers, both when full-throated and in its many quieter moments. Furthermore, we're given the 1961 orchestration of the concerto, with its slimmer wind-writing and added harp. As annotator Jens F Laurson points out, Lawrence Power has recorded the 1929 version (Hyperion, 7/07), though that too comes with a premium recommendation.

This is exceptional viola-playing. Listen from 4'31" into the finale, for example, just prior to one of the concerto's loveliest passages, and you'll note Mönkemeyer's mastery of his instrument throughout its range. As with Walton's other two string concertos, Prokofiev is often an audible influence, by which I mean its wit, acerbity and sense of magic (9'23", where bass clarinet and viola so poignantly commune), and the bittersweet slant of its melodic writing, all beautifully realised here.

The couplings also work well. *Fratres* is the latest and mellowest addition to a series of versions focusing Arvo Pärt's entrancing piece of musical stillness (this particular reworking dates from 2008). Bruch's *Kol Nidrei*, originally for cello of course, enjoys

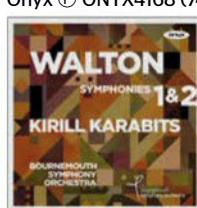
its change of register and aside from the odd octave transposition could as well have been written for the viola, while as presented here the increasingly popular Romance is a model of interpretative tenderness. Altogether a most satisfying programme, one you could usefully supplement with Lawrence Power's coupling of the Walton and Rubbra concertos. **Rob Cowan**

Walton

Symphonies - No 1; No 2

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra / Kirill Karabits

Onyx (F) ONYX4168 (74' · DDD)



If memory serves, Martyn Brabbins was the last to pair both these masterworks on a single disc (with the BBC Scottish SO on Hyperion, 10/11), since when we've also been treated to Edward Gardner's blistering versions with the BBC SO as part of his Walton series for Chandos (7/14 and 5/15). What's more, loyal supporters of the Bournemouth SO will need no reminding of the excellence of Andrew Litton's accounts (10/95, now handily available on a generously stuffed Decca twofer with the three Walton concertos).

It's the First Symphony which comes off by far the better on this new Onyx coupling. Kirill Karabits keeps a steady hand on the structural tiller, elicits an impressively secure orchestral response and excavates plenty of ear-pricking detail: in the relentless opening *Allegro assai*, for example, how good it is to hear the strings' syncopated ostinatos cut through the furious welter of activity (listen from 11'11" – or fig 36 – to hear what I mean). For all Karabits's shrewdly chosen tempos and the infectious spirit on display, however, there isn't quite the visceral impact or animal excitement generated by the composer himself in his early 1950s recording with the Philharmonia (2/53) or André Previn in his classic 1966 LSO version (the latter's truly *Presto con malizia* Scherzo remains unsurpassed); the slow movement, too, emerges just a little coolly by the side of Gardner's (his BBC SO wind principals are more piercingly expressive than their Bournemouth counterparts). Still, Karabits's remains a most enjoyable performance, its defiantly musical, unflashy manners reminding me of Vernon Handley's underrated 1988 account with this same orchestra (8/89 – nla).

Unfortunately, I'm altogether less happy with Karabits's reading of the Second Symphony, where clarity of articulation and texture is achieved at the expense of thrusting momentum, nervous intensity and smouldering passion. Granted, the actual playing is pleasingly polished, but at the same time there's a perplexing want of intrepid flair and freewheeling spontaneity (the highly strung first movement in particular sounds disconcertingly sedate). In other words, Walton's inspiration fails to take wing the way it so conspicuously does on George Szell's electrifying premiere recording in Cleveland (9/62), to say nothing of Previn (5/74) and Mackerras (12/89).

Production values throughout are first-class; and Daniel Jaffé supplies a succinct and knowledgeable annotation. Final verdict: best, I think, to sample before you buy. **Andrew Achenbach**

Dresden

Califano Sonata a quattro in C **Fasch** Quadri -

FWV N:B2; FWV N:g1 **Heinichen** Sonata, SeiH257

Lotti Echo in F **Quantz** Sonata, QV 2:41a/b

Telemann Sonata, TWV42:c4 **Vivaldi** Sonata a quattro, RV801

Zefiro / Alfredo Bernardini ob

Arcana (F) A438 (78' · DDD)



It's a nice disc that can make evident something you may have known about but never quite appreciated for yourself. In the case of this latest release from Zefiro, it is the high expertise of the double-reed players at the Dresden court in the late Baroque period that is on display. How telling it is that no less a figure than Quantz seems to have moved to become one of the 18th century's finest flautists only after being put off his first instrument, the oboe, by the fearsome abilities of the Dresden virtuosos. The players in this assortment of works mainly for two oboes, bassoon and continuo pay fitting tribute to that legacy, but to judge from the music itself there was no shortage of top-rate repertoire either.

The most impressive pieces – skilfully made with a well-balanced and suave manner – are two 'quadri' by Fasch, a composer who has often been praised in these pages. Yet Heinichen's sonata is another fine work that really allows the bassoon to sing, Vivaldi's sonata has typical drive and some concerto-like break-outs for oboe I, the sonata by the Dresden cellist Arcangelo Califano has a touch of gawky individuality and Lotti's *Echo* does exactly



Precision and brilliance: Vladimir Jurowski and the State Academic Symphony Orchestra of Russia 'Evgeny Svetlanov' offer a delicious Tchaikovsky *Sleeping Beauty*

what it says on the tin as if in some bosky opera scene. Two trio sonatas, by Quantz and the ever-reliable Telemann, complete the line-up.

Zefiro's own expertise in these pieces is itself of impeccable quality and gladsome spirit. The oboes of Alfredo Bernardini and Paolo Grazzi are excellently matched, creamy and focused in tone and devoid of that honky character people either like or dislike in the instrument's Baroque version. Their spectral colouring of Vivaldi's third movement, almost like clarinets, is extraordinary. Alberto Grazzi's bassoon, too, is a sweet-voiced charmer, smoothly relishing its honeyed moments in the Fasch and Heinichen. The continuo, in various combinations of violone, viola da gamba, bassoon, theorbo and harpsichord, provide a firmly cushioned underlay for these delightful performers to dance over. Nice!

Lindsay Kemp

'The Voice of the Trumpet'

Arban Variations on 'Casta diva' **Arlen** The Wizard of Oz - Somewhere over the rainbow **Bellini** Malinconia, ninfa gentile **Delibes** Les filles de Cadix **Donizetti** Don Pasquale - Povero Ernesto^a **Fauré** Après un rêve, Op 7 No 1 **Gershwin** The man I love. Porgy and Bess - Summertime^b **Handel** Ode for the Birthday of Queen Anne, HWV74 - Eternal source of light

divine^c **Offenbach** Les contes d'Hoffmann - Belle nuit, ô nuit d'amour^b **Rachmaninov** How fair this spot, Op 21 No 7 **Rodgers** Babes in Arms - My funny Valentine. The Sound of Music - My favourite things **Rossini** Soirées musicales - La danza **Tchaikovsky** Eugene Onegin - Lensky's Aria **Vivaldi** Giustino - Vedrò con mio diletto
Lucienne Renaudin Vary tpt with
^a**Rolando Villazón** ten ^b**Erik Truffaz** tpt/bugle
^c**Christophe Dumaux** countertenor
Lille National Orchestra / Roberto Rizzi Brignoli
Warner Classics © 9029 58883-2 (72' • DDD)



Is it a sign of age or are trumpeters getting younger these days? By the time she was signed last autumn by Warner Classics at the tender age of 17, Lucienne Renaudin Vary had already won the 'Révélation' category at France's Victoires de la Musique Classique. She studied trumpet with Philippe Lafitte at the Conservatoire du Mans before entering the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Paris in 2014. This debut album, entitled 'The Voice of the Trumpet', is devoted to vocal items - operatic arias and songs in arrangements for her instrument.

Her buttery tone is wonderful, applying a smoky filter for some of the jazzier numbers (of which there are quite a few). I'm not convinced that the trumpet would be the obvious choice of instrument for an arrangement of Lensky's aria from *Eugene Onegin* but Renaudin Vary phrases it sensitively. There's plenty of flash in numbers like Delibes's 'Les filles de Cadix' and Jean-Baptiste Arban's *Variations on 'Casta diva'* which demonstrate her digital dexterity.

For a couple of numbers, she is joined by the jazz trumpeter Erik Truffaz, especially well in a bluesy account of Gershwin's 'Summertime', but the overall programme isn't especially satisfying, a lightweight pick'n'mix selection where the orchestral arrangements of the popular numbers are rather swoony; that to 'Over the rainbow' may well have you reaching for the nausea tablets.

There are two 'straight' numbers where Renaudin Vary doesn't take the solo part but offers an obbligato line. Rolando Villazón's diminished vocal resources are just right for a nicely phrased 'Povero Ernesto' from Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*, while countertenor Christophe Dumaux offers a plangent 'Eternal source of light divine' from Handel's *Ode for the Birthday of Queen Anne*. **Mark Pullinger**

Schumann's Rhenish Symphony

Michael Tilson Thomas tells Joshua Kosman about his approach to the work's finer details

For conductor Michael Tilson Thomas, the path to Schumann's Third Symphony (*Rhenish*) – indeed, to all four of the composer's symphonies, which he has now recorded live with the San Francisco Symphony – runs through two influential forebears. One is the pianist Sviatoslav Richter, whose playing, he says, revealed aspects of the composer's keyboard works he had never suspected before. The other is Leonard Bernstein, who famously took the young musician under his wing and who remains Tilson Thomas's most formative role model.

In an essay accompanying the box-set, released last month on the orchestra's own label, SFS Media, Tilson Thomas sketches out a memory of an early coaching session with Bernstein on a particular juncture in the Third Symphony. And during a recent interview in the three-storey Victorian house in San Francisco's Pacific Heights neighbourhood which he shares with husband and business partner Joshua Robison, he fleshed out that anecdote with some broader reflections on Schumann's creative personality and on the task of interpreting his music in collaboration with an orchestra.

The relevant passage comes near the beginning of the second movement Scherzo, at bar 14, where the jaunty main theme prepares for a brief first visit to the subdominant and Schumann marks the music *poco ritardando*. What, Bernstein asked his 23-year-old protégé, might such a marking imply from an expressive point of view?

'In those days, Lenny and I would look at scores together, and, of course, he never told me anything specific to do. But he would point things out and then ask a lot of questions – that was the process. And at that point I had played quite a lot of Schumann piano music and chamber music, but now he was encouraging me to look at the music and figure out what exactly it was really saying.'

'So, OK, the score says to go slower. And Lenny said, "Well, but *why* go slower? Give me some reasons to go slower." It was like Stanislavsky. "Well, because I'm lost and I don't know what's happening next," I said. "OK, what's another reason?" – "Well, what's happening right now is so beautiful that I don't want to go anywhere else. Or, someone's pushing me forwards and I'm really resentful and I don't want to give in." And so on – give me another reason, give me another reason. Finally, he said, "OK, so of all these reasons,



Michael Tilson Thomas at the Schumann symphonies recording sessions

what do you feel is the *actual* reason that works for you in this particular moment?" And what I decided was that it was a moment of charmed bemusement, of thinking, "Where *could* we go next? What about ... *here*?"'

Much of what is essential in Schumann's orchestral music, Tilson Thomas believes, grows out of the fact that it was originally conceived at the piano, and his interpretative decisions about phrasing and metre are often made with reference to the framing of the music at the keyboard. He points to the main theme of the first movement in the Third Symphony as a classic example.

'What very often happens – and I've seen very distinguished, venerable colleagues do this – is that people try to play the opening of the piece as a hemiola, as if it's in this big three across the bar. I don't think that's right. I think it's an exuberant waltz from the very beginning.' (Here he begins to sing the main theme in a bouncy Viennese lilt.)

'But to get down to brass tacks, the real issue is in the second bar, and whether the repeated B flat in the first violins



The historical view

Schumann

Letter to his Bonn-based publisher Simrock, March 19, 1851

I should have been glad to see a greater work published here on the Rhine, and I mean this symphony, which perhaps mirrors here and there something of Rhenish life.

Felix Weingartner

Die Symphonie nach Beethoven (Leipzig 1897)

I suppose many of you will now look upon me as a heretic when I openly acknowledge that I count Schumann's symphonies as in no wise among his most important works.

Roland Barthes

In his 1979 essay 'Loving Schumann'

Schumann's music goes much farther than the ear; it goes into the body, into the muscles by the beats of its rhythm, and somehow into the viscera by the voluptuous pleasure of its *melos*: as if on each occasion the piece was written only for [the] person ... who plays it.

is held over or not. Because if you do, that sends you off into hemiola territory. And, of course, holding it over is easy to do on the violin – but on a piano, you actually have to lift your hand off the keyboard to play the second B flat. So now we have questions of what legato is, and what marcato is, in the context of the way the music would sound on the piano.'

For Tilson Thomas, the score of the Third Symphony is chock-full of moments where such micro-decisions have to be made. It is, he says, a function of the overarching challenge of orchestral playing, which is that interpretative choices are harder to make intuitively or spontaneously.

'There are all sorts of things that performers would do with this music if it were a solo or chamber piece, that they wouldn't even think twice about! They would just say, "Yeah, there should be a little lift here, there should be a little more tenuto here. It's the same music we heard before, but this time it should be a little more urgent." It's only because you get this many people playing together that decisions have to be made by somebody as to what the profile will be.'

'In this piece you have to remember these 219 things, and in that piece 702 things – you're frantically trying to pack it all in'

Over more than two decades at the helm of the San Francisco Symphony, Tilson Thomas has reshaped the orchestra into an ensemble that reflects his own commitment to spontaneity and responsiveness in performance (that's one reason why the Schumann recordings, like all his recordings with the orchestra, are drawn from live concerts). The result is a partnership that is far from the old top-down model, and one in which Tilson Thomas is eager to share credit with the orchestra members for the adventurous sound that results.

'Some of the sections in the Schumann symphonies – for example the third movement of the Third – definitely seem like intermezzos. It's the kind of stuff that happens in *Kreisleriana* (for solo piano). So that means asking the orchestra to be flexible enough to understand who's leading and who's following at any given moment, and it means that something considerably more personal can result in some of those inner movements.'

In closing, Tilson Thomas harks back to the early years of exploring these works, both under Bernstein's guidance and on his own.

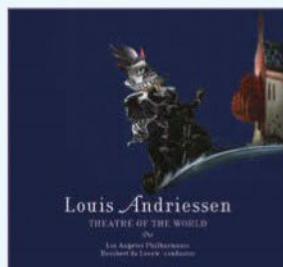
'When you first start studying this stuff, each new piece presents so many things to learn. Oh my God, in this piece you have to remember these 219 things, and then there's another 702 things you have to remember in other pieces, and you're just frantically trying to pack it all in. But after a time, you start to recognise that many of these things are expressions of the same musical situations, just in different presentations. And it makes it a lot easier to recognise those situations when they recur.'

'I often think of big pieces of the repertoire, such as the Schumann symphonies, like national parks. You come back to the trail in a national park and you say, "Oh yeah, I know this trail. There are different ways you could walk – you could linger here and smell the fuchsias, or press ahead for that first thrilling view of the waterfall." And who you're with on the trail makes a huge difference.' **G**

To read November's review of the complete symphonies visit Gramophone.co.uk

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Chamber



Harriet Smith dives into a star-studded Trout Quintet: *'This Trout is clearly in a fast-flowing river; the first movement bubbling with excitement from the off'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 76**

CPE Bach

Viola da gamba Sonatas - Wq88; Wq136; Wq137.

Keyboard Sonata, Wq50/3 (H138)

Johanna Rose *va da gamba* **Javier Núñez** *hpd*

Rubicon  RCD1019 (66' • DDD)



The German viola da gamba player Johanna Rose has already appeared on a fair few recordings, several of which have been with the Spanish early music ensemble Accademia del Piacere. This is her debut solo disc, though, and it's a very lovely thing.

Recorded with her duo partner since 2013, the harpsichordist Javier Núñez, Rose's programme stands out first of all simply for having done its bit to expand what is a remarkably small back catalogue of existing recordings of these sonatas. But more importantly it stands out for the actual performances. There's something beguiling about CPE Bach's viola da gamba sonatas. There he was in the melting pot of new artistic, scientific and social ideas that was Frederick the Great's Berlin court, writing his famously forwards-facing music, and yet with these sonatas we see him turning his hand to an instrument that was already going out of fashion, and a sensitive hand at that; these are exquisitely crafted, intimate-sounding works which reflect the viola da gamba's gentler, old-school refinement.

Rose draws out every ounce of intimacy and grace, too. These are beautifully sensitive, expressive and musically shaped performances. There's often a wonderful aria-like quality to her slow movements; the C major Sonata's *Arioso* final movement truly is vocal in delivery, for instance. Then, with the more up-tempo, virtuoso moments, such as the lightning runs of the D major Sonata's central *Allegro di molto*, she brings a gentleness together with a strong sense of rhythm. Her tone itself is glorious too: rich and dark, with an exceptionally attractive grainy edge to it.

She's found her perfect musical partner in Núñez, as is plain both from his sympathetic partnering and from the easy lyrical naturalness and delicate virtuosity he then brings to his solo turn, the Keyboard Sonata in A minor, Wq50/3. All in all, a really strong solo debut. **Charlotte Gardner**

Beethoven

Violin Sonatas - No 3, Op 12 No 3;

No 7, Op 30 No 2; No 10, Op 96

Baptiste Lopez *vn* **Maude Gratton** *pf*

Mirare  MIR360 (70' • DDD)



Period instruments are to the fore here, an anonymous Italian violin from 1690 (the Gaulard bow dates from 1820), and a fortepiano, the work of Maximilian Schott in Vienna in 1835. The sound they make ranges from blatant busyness in the first movement of the lovely Third Sonata to prayer-like contemplation in the *Adagio cantabile* of Op 30 No 2, where Baptiste Lopez's chaste playing style suits the music's withdrawn mood. There's also a palpable sense of camaraderie in the ensuing Scherzo, while the finale enjoys the benefit of edgy drama. A similar juxtaposition of profound reverie and fun lies at the centre of the very last sonata, Op 96 (of 1812) and here Lopez indulges the *Adagio espressivo* with about as much warmth as the dictates of period performance deem appropriate. However, the outer sections of the Scherzo sound manic, though the Trio allows for some degree of relaxation.

Enthusiasts for the 'period performance' tradition who have read thus far will likely guess what to expect. These are bold, assertive performances, where the two players share a more or less equal interpretative footing, the pianist larger-than-life, which suits the Op 12 Sonata better than it does the two later works. But subtlety, elegance and telling gradations of tone? Not much, I'm afraid. OK,



Richard Bratby on Steven Isserlis's First World War programme: *'Isserlis's top notes have an almost human quality; eerie cries punctuate each of these works'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 79**

I appreciate that Alina Ibragimova and Cédric Tiberghien take the modern-instrument route, but they do so with a memorably light touch; and when you hear how trippingly they emerge from the thoughtful world of the C minor Sonata's slow movement to its chuckling Scherzo, you realise what's missing from the version under review. Happily both recordings are widely available to stream (on Spotify, Apple Music, Qobuz, etc), so if you have a computer or smartphone to hand you can sample both for yourself. **Rob Cowan**

Violin Sonatas – selected comparison:

Ibragimova, Tiberghien (8/10, 12/10, 7/11)

(WIGM) WHLIVE0036/41/45 (oas)

Brahms • Janáček

Brahms Two Clarinet Sonatas, Op 120

Janáček Sonata (arr Brill)

Shirley Brill *cl* **Jonathan Aner** *pf*

Hänssler Classic  HC17001 (59' • DDD)



These performances of Brahms's clarinet sonatas have a feeling of spontaneity that suggests involved, intimate conversation. Shirley Brill and Jonathan Aner can be daringly free with the tempo, yet their interpretations always sound natural, perhaps because they're clearly motivated by the music's variegated phraseology and changes of character. They take the *appassionato* marking in the first movement of No 1 to heart, for instance. Note the dramatic way Brill shapes the surging melodic line, and also the overall ebb and flow, which seems to be driven here by some potent gravitational force. Impressive, too, is the way they paint the central Trio of the *Allegretto grazioso* as an autumnal scene of swirling, fluttering leaves, and then how the return of the sunny opening section is slightly more muted, as if subtly coloured by the Trio's more clouded atmosphere.

Brill's tone is reedy and intensely expressive, and she can whittle it down to the merest whisper. Aner's meticulously



Intimacy and grace: viola da gambist Johanna Rose and harpsichordist Javier Núñez are perfect partners in CPE Bach

articulate playing generally serves as a fine foil for Brill's hearty style, although it can turn percussively hard-edged in some loud, chordal passages. This edginess is less of a distraction in Brill's superb transcription of Janáček's Violin Sonata, where the music itself abounds with sharp melodic and rhythmic angles. 'The fact that Janáček's writing for the violin is sparse of double-stops and particular string-instrument techniques makes the adaptation for the clarinet all the more natural', Brill writes in the preface to the score (published by Bärenreiter). And, in fact, few concessions seem to have been made in the transcription. She effectively replaces pizzicato writing with 'slap tonguing', for example. Only in the final *Adagio*, where Janáček has the violin play with a mute, does Brill's version miss that movement's veiled, elegiac quality. Otherwise, the clarinet seems to amplify the sonata's folk-infused dynamism and soaring lyricism. As in the Brahms, Brill and Aner are acutely sensitive to the music's myriad harmonic details and their playing fairly bristles with character and incident. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Cage · T Johnson

Cage *Chess Pieces. Four Dances*

T Johnson *Counting Duets - No 2.*

Rational Melodies - Nos 1-5, 8-12, 14-15 & 21

Trio Omphalos

Wergo  WER7370-2 (63' • DDD)



As David Lang indicates in his warmly opinionated booklet recollections, Tom Johnson (b1939) is best known as an insightful and frequently humorous observer of the American experimental scene – his distinctive outlook being no less typical of his own music. *Rational Melodies* (1993) consists of 21 pieces each averaging under two minutes and scored 'for any instruments'. As realised for the clarinet, piano and percussion formation of Trio Omphalos, these unfold as single-line or unison melodies which prove as winsome as they are diverting; albeit with that inscrutability, even anonymity of manner that remains key to the thinking of one long intent on the eradication of what might be termed 'composer-centric' expression.

In that sense, and whatever his stated assertions to the contrary, John Cage was always his own focal point artistically. Not least in the *Four Dances* (1943), written for choreography by Hanya Holm, three of which draw upon elements from blues, ragtime and even stride in an animated as well as amusing fashion. By contrast, the second dance evokes more the ethereal whimsy of Satie – reminding one that Cage was nothing if not provocative in

his disavowal of ego-driven creativity. The Omphalos render both these works with precision and enjoyment.

A pity only 13 of the Johnson pieces are featured (there was room for the remainder), though listeners are given the second piece from his *Counting Duets* (1982) as a whispered encore and, more substantially, a realisation by the redoubtable pianist Margaret Leng Tan of *Chess Pieces* – Cage's contribution to a 1944 art exhibition, its notated element duly transformed into this eventful musical process. All very distinctive and (whisper it quietly!) individual. **Richard Whitehouse**

Debussy

Violin Sonata^a. Cello Sonata^b. Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp^c. Piano Trio^d. Syrinx^e

^{ce}Emmanuel Pahud ^{ff ad}Renaud Capuçon ^{vn}

^{ac}Gérard Caussé ^{va bd}Edgar Moreau ^{vc abd}Bertrand Chamayou ^{pf}Marie-Pierre Langlamet ^{hp}

Erato  9029 57739-6 (66' • DDD)



'The musical genius of France is something like fantasy in sensibility', said Debussy, and if it's still hard to swallow the idea that his three late sonatas were the product of a fervent wartime nationalism, the notion that these extraordinary pieces

are essentially fantasies is a lot easier to accept. Especially in these captivating performances by a team of six world-famous 'musiciens francophones', as the cover describes them (musical nationalism dies hard, it seems).

Because fantasy is certainly the unifying factor here. If there's such a thing as distinctly Gallic cello-playing, Edgar Moreau's narrow-bore sound and deft articulation surely embody it to perfection. His rubbery pizzicatos match Bertrand Chamayou's sharply characterised pianism in the central 'Sérénade' to evoke a figure uncannily like Petrushka. Renaud Capuçon and Chamayou find a similar rapport in the Violin Sonata: this is a beautifully paced performance, and Capuçon is sparing with the full richness of his tone – which paradoxically makes the whole thing only more sensuous. When all three come together in the youthful Piano Trio, the combination of elegant restraint and sweet (but never exaggerated) rapture is both affecting and gently amusing.

And although none of these players appears in the Sonata for flute, viola and harp, the spirit of fantasy carries over. Gérard Caussé, in particular, can switch in a blink from velvet softness to a ringing, nasal clarity, and in the sonata's opening 'Pastorale' the group's colours and articulation vary almost by the phrase. My only reservation involves the recording. A close chamber ambience for the string pieces is replaced by a more resonant acoustic for the two flute works, and what's tolerable in Emmanuel Pahud's eloquent *Syrinx* leads to congestion in the sonata. Still, the playing throughout this disc is so sensitive and stylish that you might well choose to overlook that. **Richard Bratby**

Dvořák

Piano Quartets – No 1, Op 23 B53;

No 2, Op 87 B162

Busch Trio with **Miguel da Silva** *va*

Alpha  ALPHA288 (71' • DDD)



Following their disc of Dvořák piano trios, which Rob Cowan much enjoyed (9/16), the Busch Trio are joined by viola player Miguel da Silva for the first two piano quartets. It beats me why No 2 isn't more of a staple of the concert hall, toweringly uplifting masterpiece that it is, and it's good to have this version hot on the heels of the stylish Josef Suk Quartet (A/17).

Compared to the Czech group, the Busch/da Silva tend to be somewhat drawn

out in the second-movement *Lento*, though their approach to the more tumultuous writing (from 2'58" in) is suitably dramatic and there are many instances of characterful playing, such as the cello pizzicato section at 3'47". But for a sense of being led unerringly through the movement, the Suk and the Gringolts line-up from the Lugano festival are both more unerring without any loss of ardour. The Lugano players also tend to be speedier in the relaxed third movement. Here the Busch/da Silva seem to these ears to get it just right, with plenty of colour in the cimbalom-like writing and a palpable enjoyment of Dvořák's dynamic range. The finale finds the Busch and Suk very much in accord in terms of tempo, allowing this joyous music to unfold with complete naturalness; compared to them, Gringolts et al sound positively brusque-issimo.

The First Quartet – dating from 1875, the same year as the Fifth Symphony – is much more of a rarity and while it might not be on the same level as the Second Quartet, it is nonetheless an important landmark on Dvořák's journey to musical magnificence. It was written in a mere 18 days and the Busch/da Silva seem to reflect that energy in the spirited first movement. If the piano doesn't have the most exciting time of it in the variation-form slow movement, the string-writing is fully idiomatic and the players balance textures beautifully. They're alive, too, to the *scherzando* qualities of the finale, a skitteringly bouncy affair. A fine recording sets the seal on another enticing disc from the Busch. **Harriet Smith**

Piano Quartet No 2 – selected comparisons:

Leschenko, Gringolts, Braude, Théden

(8/13) (EMI) 721119-2

Josef Suk Pf Qt (A/17) (SUPR) SU4227-2

McCabe

The Woman by the Sea^a. String Quartet

No 6, 'Silver Nocturnes'^b. Horn Quintet^c

Sacconi Quartet with ^bRoderick Williams *bar*

^cDavid Pyatt *hn* ^aJohn McCabe *pf*

NMC  NMCD230 (62' • DDD • T)



Two and a half years after his death, McCabe's music continues to appear on disc (witness also the marvellous recordings of piano works from Jane Ford – Prima Facie, 11/17), but one featuring the man himself at the piano is special indeed. *The Woman by the Sea* (2001) is the third and longest of his piano quintets (after *Nocturnal*, 1966, and *Sam Variations*, 1989),

and the first to be recorded. It was inspired by the final scene of Kenji Mizoguchi's 1954 film *Sansho Dayu* in which – at the end of her life – a mother is reunited with a son kidnapped years previously. An intense, emotional tone poem, shot through with the sound of the sea, McCabe's 2009 recording made at Champs Hill reminds us not only what a fine pianist he was but what a fine chamber musician, too. His partnership with the Sacconi Quartet yields the finest performance of this work I have heard.

The Sixth String Quartet, *Silver Nocturnes* (2011), is an austere radiant fusion of quartet and song-cycle, beautifully performed here with the baritone Roderick Williams. A memorial piece, in memory of the late Simon Boosey, it sets verses by three 16th-century poets, including Sir Philip Sidney, framed by quotes from Richard II. If the structure sounds Brittenish, the music is pure McCabe. The three-movement Horn Quintet (2010-11) is outwardly abstract but seems to have been inspired by *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Like the Quartet, the Horn Quintet is a remarkably subtle composition and familiarity only deepens respect for the composer's craft so unobtrusively deployed and manifestly understood by the Sacconi and David Pyatt. NMC's sound, mastered by David Lefeber, is superb. I cannot recommend this strongly enough, and there is a free download available with the disc of McCabe's piano trio *Desert III: Landscape*.

Guy Rickards

Schubert

Piano Quintet, 'Trout', D667^a. Notturno, D897^b.

Ave Maria, D839. Ständchen, D957 No 4

Anne-Sophie Mutter *vn* ^aHwayoon Lee *va*

^{ab}Maximilian Hornung *vc* ^aRoman Patkólo *db*

Daniil Trifonov *pf*

DG  479 7570 (56' • DDD)



I have some sympathy for DG. How do you market yet another Schubert *Trout* Quintet except by emphasising the stars of the show – in this instance Anne-Sophie Mutter and Daniil Trifonov? But it does seem a little unfair that not only are their names much more prominent on the cover, but so are their photographs, with Mutter dressed as a couture mermaid, Trifonov beside her in a white open-necked shirt, while the other three, dressed in black, fade into the background.

Still, what matters is the playing. This *Trout* is clearly in a fast-flowing river, the first movement bubbling with excitement from the off, Trifonov's triplets tripping effortlessly along. While it's scintillating in its clarity, the big climax, where the pianist bursts into *fortissimo* semiquavers (2'43") sounds just too rushed. It's telling that Brendel & co don't reach that point until 50 seconds later, and they're not exactly sluggish. The third-movement Scherzo is also overtly *presto* compared to the Brendel ensemble (who find a quiet wit here) and Paul Lewis and friends. Exciting or just a touch aggressive? It's a taste thing.

Brendel introduces the melody of the second-movement *Andante* with palpable affection, with a youthful Zehetmair announcing his arrival with great subtlety, shaping the melody beautifully. The effect is quite different in the Mutter set: Trifonov & co set the scene with a quiet elegance but you're in no doubt that Mutter is the main attraction here, bringing an almost microscopic variety of shadings and colourings to each phrase. Hyperion's Marianne Thorsen is much more of a team player and, as the movement develops, Lewis reminds us of what a fabulous Schubertian he is.

I like the veiled way in which Mutter introduces the song theme of the fourth-

movement variations but am less enamoured of the way she tends to steal the limelight elsewhere, be it in the high-lying trills in Var 1 or her over-prominent accompaniment to the viola's melody in Var 2. Trifonov, on the other hand, plays with a combination of élan and sensitivity. But again, they go hell for leather in this movement – the minor-key Var 4 is positively cartoonish at this speed. The finale has a great sense of purpose but some of their *fortes* border on the aggressive; by comparison the Philips and Hyperion accounts are much more affable.

We get three generous fillers – the lustrous *Notturno* for piano trio, D897, and two Schubert song arrangements – 'Ständchen' and 'Ave Maria', both of which Trifonov and Mutter have tweaked without losing the Romantic ardour of the original arrangements, made by Mischa Elman and Jascha Heifetz respectively.

Mutter fans (and probably Trifonov fans) will of course snap this up. But Schubert fans should perhaps exercise more caution.

Harriet Smith

Trout Quintet – selected comparisons:

Zehetmair, Zimmermann, Doven, Riegelbauer, Brendel
(1/96) (PHIL) 446 001-2PH

Leopold Stg Trio, Mitchell, Lewis
(5/06) (HYPE) CDA67527

Telemann

Complete Trio Sonatas with Recorder and Violin

Da Camera

Chandos Chaconne CHAN0817 (77' • DDD)



'How could I possibly remember everything I composed for strings and winds?

I particularly devoted myself to the composing of trios ... People even flattered me as having done my best work here.' So wrote Telemann in his autobiography of 1740, and never were truer words said. He didn't mention their limitless stylistic and emotional variation, which is very much on display in these immensely natural readings from Da Camera; a point worth making at the outset, because it's possible that a goodly proportion of you might be mentally qualifying that promise of variety: '... well, for a collection of Baroque recorder-and-string trio sonatas, anyway, and frankly only then if you're really paying attention ...'

The trio sonatas collected here are plucked from two sources, four from Telemann's *Essercizii musici* of 1739-40 and four from the 'Darmstadt manuscript'. With the latter, Da Camera have swapped

JANUARY AND FEBRUARY HIGHLIGHTS

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'Yulianna Avdeeva is an artist who can truly make the piano sing'

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the usually heard violin for the original scoring's slightly lower-tuned treble viol, and Susanna Pell's London copy of an instrument from c1630 reveals a lovely, subtly different and more mellow tone quality that beautifully complements the alto recorder timbre.

As for variety, there's everything here, from Telemann's traditional German contrapuntal style to his delight in Eastern European folk music and his adoption of the new 'mixed style'; and Da Camera themselves hit every one of these nails on the head. Furthermore, it's not all continuo work for Devine on his single-manual 1738 German copy, because not only does he get *Essercizii musici*'s Trio Sonata No 8, TWV42:B4 – one of the earliest instances of obbligato harpsichord-writing – but also the programme's two bonus non-trio offerings, Fantaisies Nos 1 and 8 from Telemann's 1732-33 harpsichord collection.

To zoom outwards once more, the engineering itself wraps all the above in a church acoustic and a vibrantly near sound, Murphy's three boxwood altos and boxwood voice flute slightly forwards, with Pell's treble and bass viols a smidgen behind her, paired with Devine. A final nice touch is that we're told that they're tuned to 413Hz, typical for altos and voice flutes of the period, and also to Young II temperament (that's six of the keyboard's most commonly used keys' fifths tuned just, and the other six 1/6 of a diatonic comma narrower); it's this sort of loving attention to detail that pervades this whole package.

Charlotte Gardner

Ustvolskaya

Violin Sonata^a. Piano Sonata No 1^b.

Octet^c. Grand Duet^d

^aAlexander Kosoyan, ^bKhanyafi Chinakaev ^cobs

^dMikhail Waiman, ^cAlexander Stang, ^cArkady

Liskovich, ^cAbram Dukor, ^cFeodor Saakov ^{vns}

^dOleg Stolpner ^{vc} ^{ac}Maria Karandashova,

^{bd}Oleg Malov ^{pf} ^cValery Znamensky ^{timp}

Northern Flowers [®] NF/PMA99122 (71' • ADD/DDD)

Recorded ^a1961, ^b1976, ^{bd}1985



The music of Galina Ustvolskaya (1919-2006) has divided opinion since bursting on to Western new music a quarter-century ago, and these pioneering recordings tellingly convey the impact of first discovery. As the First Piano Sonata (1947) tersely demonstrates, her inimitable idiom is founded on the stratification of material – between loud and soft, stasis and motion –

so the piece unfolds as the irreconcilability of opposites; a premise intensified in the Octet (1950), its scoring for two oboes, four violins, piano and timpani setting up a poignant dialogue that culminates precisely at the point where such irreconcilability is confirmed as being inevitable.

The 1950s were bookended by the works featured here. The Violin Sonata (1952) emerges as Ustvolskaya's most taciturn and equivocal statement; the Grand Duet (1959) as arguably her most encompassing – its interplay of cello and piano exuding an abrasiveness but equally a fervency in the introspective closing section. This has not lacked recordings, with those by Mstislav Rostropovich (Warner, 5/97) and Rohan de Saram (Wergo, 3/12) offering contrasted approaches of comparable intensity, though Olegs Stolpner and Malov prove no less authentic or involving. Close and immediate sound is ideal in context, while the booklet features a biographical overview and personal reminiscence from the late Boris Tishchenko. Those yet to take the plunge into Ustvolskaya should dive head-first into this welcome issue.

Richard Whitehouse

'Altri canti d'amor'

17th Century Instrumental Works'

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Diminuzioni sopra il 'Lamento d'Apollo' **Marini**

Sonata prima sopra 'Fuggi dolente core' **Merula**

Chiacona a 3 col basso **Monteverdi** Altri canti

d'amor - Sinfonia **Rognoni** Ancor che col partire

Strozzi L'Eraclito amoroso **Uccellini** Aria decima

terza sopra 'Questa bella sirena'. Aria quarta

sopra la Ciaccona a 3. Sonata nona, Op 5

L'Estro d'Orfeo / Leonor de Lera *vn*

Challenge Classics [®] CC72760 (50' • DDD)



Despite the title and repertoire, there is no singing on this well-chosen debut CD release by the Spanish ensemble L'Estro d'Orfeo. Their pitch, of course, is to focus on the lyrical qualities of 17th-century Italian instrumental music by transferring vocal lines to cornett (in an aria from Cavalli's opera *La Calisto* and Strozzi's cantata *L'Eraclito amoroso*) or to strings (Monteverdi's madrigal *Altri canti d'amor*), and to back that up with instrumental pieces with vocal origins such as Rognoni's viola bastarda-style diminutions on Rore's madrigal *Ancor che col partire* (an impressively free-spirited break-out track, this, for gamba player Rodney Prada) or violinist/director Leonor de Lera's own

stylish (if slightly frantic) diminutions on the 'Lamento d'Apollo' from Cavalli's *Gli amori d'Apollo e di Dafne*. Clearly love is also a theme here, though the programme is satisfactorily filled out with a selection of short sonatas, canzonas and things.

This is lovely music from a popular part of the Baroque repertoire, and it receives sympathetically intimate playing from a group who achieve involving results by keeping their vocal and amorous inspirations in mind throughout. Playing at A=466Hz 'Venetian' pitch, the six-piece ensemble generate a sound that is bright and keen, without ever becoming shrill or excessively taut. Josué Meléndez's cornett-playing is deliciously fluid and sensitive, and the well-matched violins of de Lera and Lucia Giraudo are quick-footed and silvery in the sonatas by Marini and Uccellini. It all makes for a thoroughly enjoyable programme, and if it is a rather short one, well there's no law that says 70 minutes is always the best length. Certainly (and in a good way) I was left wanting more. **Lindsay Kemp**

'BWV ... or not?'

CPE Bach Violin Sonata, Wq 145 H569

(BWV1036) CPE/JS Bach Sonata, H590 No 5

(BWV1038) JS Bach Fuga, BWV1026.

Musikalisches Opfer, BWV1079 - Sonata sopr' il Soggetto Reale. Suite, BWV1025 (after Weiss, SC47) Goldberg Sonata, DürG13 (BWV1037)

Pisendel Violin Sonata (attrib; BWV1024)

Gli Incogniti / Amandine Beyer *vn*

Harmonia Mundi [®] HMM90 2322 (80' • DDD)



Does it matter if a classical work is either of uncertain origin, penned by a long-forgotten composer or stylistically atypical of its authenticated composer, if the actual notes on the page are ones worth hearing? This is the thought-provoking question behind 'BWV ... or not?', which, as its title suggests, develops its case through works attached in some way to Johann Sebastian Bach, while pertinently pointing out that nobody during the pre-intellectual-property era of these works' creation would have given a hoot.

Kicking off the programme, therefore, is BWV1025, catalogued as JS Bach's Suite for violin and cembalo obbligato in A major but actually his arrangement of a lute suite by Silvius Leopold Weiss. Also in the mix is BWV1024, the unsigned C minor violin sonata whose writing ticks some but not enough of the Bach stylistic boxes, meaning it's now attributed (with a question mark)



Sympathetic chamber partners: Rachel Podger and her Brecon Baroque colleagues with a compelling Italian programme - see review on page 80

to Bach's colleague, the violin virtuoso Johann Georg Pisendel. Then there's the C major sonata for two violins, BWV1037, which, despite being by Johann Gottlieb Goldberg, was published in 1860 under Johann Sebastian's name.

So it's an interesting and diverse assortment, performed here with enough style and conviction to genuinely make the modern-day issue of not being able to attach a 'name' to a musically worthwhile piece seem irrelevant. After all, does it really matter if it were Bach, Goldberg or someone else who penned that life-affirming Gigue in BWV1037 or the rhapsodic, aching *Adagio* that opens BWV1024?

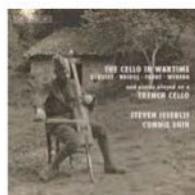
There's some beautiful duetting across the programme too, one highlight being the timbral combination of Manuel Granatiero's softly woody transverse flute against the rich fullness of Amandine Beyer's violin in BWV1038 (Bach's G major Sonata for transverse flute and violin once wrongly published under his son Carl Philipp Emanuel's name). Another nice touch is the use of a German lute, although it must be said that within the overall attractive brightness and nearness of the sound, the lute and the viola da gamba are very much in the

background of the balance, Beyer's violin and Anna Fontana's harpsichord appearing most vividly.

The CD version contains the Fantasia and Rondeau from BWV1025, but for the full suite you'll need to stream or download the album – an effort (or not) thoroughly worth your while, because this is all enjoyable stuff. **Charlotte Gardner**

'The Cello in Wartime'

Bridge Cello Sonata^a Debussy Cello Sonata^a
Fauré Cello Sonata No 1, Op 109^a Novello Keep the home-fires burning^b Parry Jerusalem^b
Saint-Saëns Carnaval des animaux – Le cygne^b
Traditional God save the King^b Webern Drei kleine Stücke, Op 11^a
Steven Isserlis ^avc^btrench vc Connie Shih pf
 BIS (F) BIS2312 (66' • DDD/DSD)



Of the numerous First World War-themed recordings that have come our way since 2014, this must be one of the most original – as well as one of most musically satisfying. Steven Isserlis and Connie Shih have put together a programme of cello

sonatas linked chronologically by the Great War. Nothing too unusual there: the real surprises start with the four short items that close the disc, played by Isserlis on what's described as a 'trench cello'.

It's actually a 'holiday cello', manufactured somewhere around 1900 – a portable, rectangular cello that can be dismantled and packed down into its own soundbox. But similar instruments are known to have been cobbled together in the trenches, and this one saw service at Ypres with its former owner, Harold Triggs. Isserlis is clearly taken with what he calls its 'shy, soft tone': there's a viola-like reticence to its sound that gives an affecting sweetness to Isserlis and Shih's performances of miniatures that they imagine might have been played by Triggs to entertain his comrades at the Front.

But Isserlis is back on his Strad for the four main works, and there's no reticence about Shih's playing either. In keeping with the wartime theme, these are passionate, red-blooded performances – the Debussy, in particular, is a thing of rich oils and dark charcoal. Isserlis's top notes have an almost human quality; eerie cries punctuate each of these works, as well as moments of jagged dissolution. Isserlis and Shih think

and move alike. There's a tragic grandeur to the still underrated Bridge Sonata (even the moments of rapture are anything but careless), and an air of suppressed tension throughout the Fauré. Webern's microscopic Three Pieces are wonderfully ominous: another unexpected moment on an imaginative and superbly realised disc.

Richard Bratby

‘Grandissima Gravita’

G

Pisendel Sonata in C minor **Tartini** Sonata, Op 2 No 5 **Veracini** Sonatas, Op 2 - No 5; No 12, ‘Sonata accademiche’ **Vivaldi** Sonata, Op 2 No 2 RV31. Suonata a solo fatto per il Maestro Pisendel, RV6 - Adagio
Rachel Podger vn **Alison McGillivray** vc
Daniele Caminiti lute/gtr **Marcin Świątkiewicz** hpd
 Channel Classics (F) CCSSA39217 (69' • DDD/DSD)



It's not often worth devoting many words of a CD review to the contents of the CD's booklet. However, what the Baroque violinist and musicologist Mark Seow has come up with for Rachel Podger and Brecon Baroque's ‘Grandissima Gravita’ is nothing short of genius: a theatre script, the action of which sees the four violinist-composer stars of the album – Antonio Vivaldi, Giuseppe Tartini, Francesco Maria Veracini and Johann Georg Pisendel – reclining tipsily on divans in heaven (yes, really) for their annual wine-fuelled reunion. Seow's imagined pile of alcohol-fogged reminiscences covers all bases, from their admiration for Corelli's famous Op 5 collection and its historical-musical significance to their backgrounds and the interlinking of their own careers; a reminder, for instance, that Tartini discovered the violin while hiding in a monastery to which he had fled after his controversial secret marriage was discovered, and then how he left the monastery for Venice and heard Veracini's tone and smooth bowing, which inspired him to dedicate his own career to bow technique. Also included are attitudes towards their contemporaries such as JS Bach, scandalous gossip (the scurrilous story of how a practical joke from Pisendel was the reason behind Veracini's limp for instance, which the heavenly Veracini refutes as the gossip of enemies), and even how the mid-18th-century European obsession with alchemy found musical embodiment in the fugue, plus in musical devices such as the one that begins the album's programme-opener: Vivaldi's

Sonata for violin and continuo in A major from Op 2, where the music ‘spirals and blossoms out of a single chord’.

The performances themselves are as stunning as the notes are imaginative, all four musicians both completely under the music's skin and under each other's, and playing as a smoothly dovetailed unit. Podger herself is exquisite; fluid, lilting and multi-shaded, with gorgeous filigree ornamentations. Her fellow Brecon Baroque members are equally faultless as sympathetic chamber partners, helped by engineering (from St Jude-on-the-Hill, Hampstead) that balances them slightly behind, while equally drawing our ears towards qualities such as McGillivray's sensitive cello duetting, the plucked colour of Caminiti's lute and guitar, and Świątkiewicz's nimbly delicate harpsichord support.

There's a sweet little encore too, in the form of Vivaldi's *Adagio* in E flat. This links back to the C minor Sonata by Pisendel, for whom Vivaldi wrote this piece: Seow's heavenly Pisendel tells Vivaldi that he couldn't have written the sonata's third movement *Affetuoso* ‘without your generous sound world in mind’.

Programmed and presented with flair, and faultlessly performed, this is a listening experience of unbridled pleasure. An exceptional album. **Charlotte Gardner**

‘Last Leaf’

Haugen Tjønneblomen Sæther Fastän Sjölin
 Intermezzo. Naja's Waltz. Shore **RT Sorensen**
 Shine You No More **Traditional** Æ Romeser.
 Despair not, O heart. The Dromer. Drømte mig
 en drøm. Hur var du i aftes så sildig. Minuet
 No 60. Now Found is the Fairest of Roses. Polska
 from Dorotea. Stædelil. Unst Boat Song
Danish Quartet

ECM New Series (F) 481 5746 (48' • DDD)



‘Last Leaf’ refers to the last leaf of parchment in the Codex Runicus, a tome dating from around 1300 that contains one of the earliest pieces of Nordic legislation but also, on that final page, the secular song ‘Drømte mig en drøm’ (‘Dreamed me a dream’). This album is arranged as a sort of codex in itself: a heartfelt, thoroughly researched and exquisitely performed journey through that and other Nordic folk songs, dances and hymns from the past five centuries that ends with the single piece that inspired it.

That piece, ‘one of the most beautiful Danish hymns we know of’, according to the Danish Quartet, is ‘Now Found is the

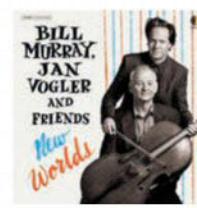
Fairest of Roses’, in which the theologian HA Brorson laid his yuletide text over a Lutheran funeral chorale. It is played here with the combination of focused lightness and floating tension that the DSQ might deploy in a Beethoven slow movement. In the end, it slips away – the most saddening but smile-inducing moment in an album that traverses simple emotions but taps something deep at the same time.

Indeed, the quartet pose a parallel question in the booklet: ‘Can a rustic folk dance conjure up feelings of melancholy and contemplation?’ The ensemble's considered arrangements provide an answer as much as their performances. Repetition presents an opportunity to layer, weave, darken and question. Never do any of the arrangements drift into the schmaltzy (we hear a double bass, a harmonium, a piano and a glockenspiel in addition to the four strings of the ensemble). When presented with unusual material, as in the arrangements the ensemble has discovered by the 18th-century Danish fiddler Rasmus Storm, the performances mine its unusual qualities. There are three original works by cellist Frederik Sjölin, the best of them *Naja's Waltz*, which moves from a light pizzicato to a deep-throated song.

‘In the old days’, continues the quartet's own booklet note, ‘you were considered a good fiddler if you knew a lot of tunes, you could play loudly for a very long time and most importantly, you kept the beat.’ They certainly do the latter. But they also invest this music with the sort of ensemble precision, subtlety of colour and well-timed abandon that they do Shostakovich and the rest of them. The best album of folk ditties from a string quartet you'll ever hear? Probably. **Andrew Mellor**

‘New Worlds’

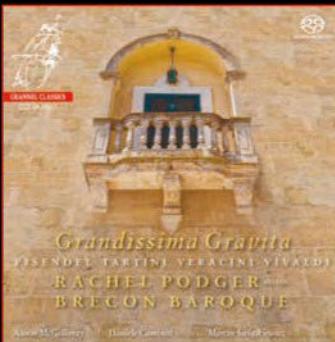
JS Bach Solo Cello Suite No 1, BWV1007 -
 Prelude **Bernstein** West Side Story - America;
 I feel pretty; Somewhere **Foster** I dream of
 Jeanie with the light brown hair **Gershwin** Porgy
 and Bess - It ain't necessarily so **Mancini** Moon
 River **V Morrison** When will I ever learn to live in
 God **Piazzolla** Muerte del Ángel **Ravel** Violin
 Sonata - Blues **Saint-Saëns** Carnaval des
 animaux - Le cygne **Schubert** Piano Trio No 1,
 D898 - Andante un poco mosso
Bill Murray voc **Mira Wang** vn
Jan Vogler vc **Vanessa Perez** pf
 Decca Gold (F) 481 5791 (65' • DDD)



If this disc is Bill Murray's belated attempt to launch a crossover career as a

new releases

CHANNEL CLASSICS



Chamber Choice
December 2017
BBC Music Magazine

ccs sa 39217
Rachel Podger &
Brecon Baroque

'Grandissima Gravita'
Pisendel, Tartini,
Veracini, Vivaldi

*'A world of
musical alchemy.'*



ccs 39517
Rosanne Philippens violin
Sinfonieorchester St. Gallen
Otto Tausk conductor
Julien Quentin piano

'Rosanne Philippens plays
Prokofiev'

*'His music
touches the soul.'*



ccs 39317
Ragazze Quartet

'Spiegel'
Mendelssohn & Beethoven

*'The quartets
mirror one
another.'*



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Bart Schneemann baroque oboe
Tulipa Consort

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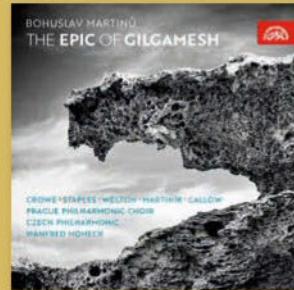


NEW RELEASES



Bohuslav Martinů – The Epic of Gilgamesh

Crowe / Staples / Welton / Martiník / Callow
Czech Philharmonic / Manfred Honeck



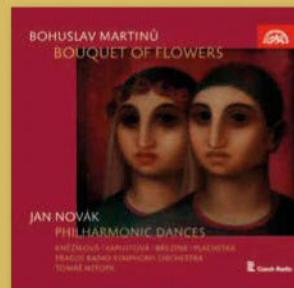
SU 4225-2

BBC Radio 3 CD Review
Disc of the Week

*The world premiere
recording of 'Gilgamesh'
in the original English
version.*

Bohuslav Martinů – Bouquet of Flowers

Jan Novák – Philharmonic Dances
Kněžíková / Kapustová / Březina / Plachetka
Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra / Tomáš Netopil



SU 4220-2

*Bohuslav Martinů's
Bouquet of Flowers
– rediscovered after
60 years.*

Petr Eben – Labyrinth

Piano Trio, String Quartet, Piano Quintet
Martinů Quartet / Karel Košárek piano



SU 4232-2

*A revelatory recording
of Petr Eben's chamber
works.*

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GRAMOPHONE Collector

CELLISTS TAKE A BOW

Richard Bratby delves into a pile of recent cello-and-piano discs



Emotionally charged: Matt Haimovitz and Christopher O'Riley play Russian cello sonatas

can't have been the first teenage cellist to come unstuck on the first movement of Beethoven's Sonata, Op 102 No 2.

I'd expected to tear headlong into some maximum-strength Ludwig van. Instead, rehearsing without a piano, I found a puzzlingly incomplete kit of parts: melodies that ended mid-flow, unexplained semibreves and low, grumbling figures that might be accompaniments – or might not. At 16, I didn't realise that I was dealing with one of Beethoven's most subtly constructed sonata *allegros*, one of the first works in the history of music to place cello and piano on a truly equal footing.

There's no problem on that count with the debut CD by the young German cellist **Valentino Wörlich** and the pianist **Elisabeth Brauss**. Their Beethoven is crisp, bright and capricious, and if the piano sound is perhaps a little forward, you're at least never in doubt that this is a partnership between two players who think and move together. Wörlich is an extrovert player, with a focused, gleaming tone – and we'll come back to that in a moment, because that same sonata's companion piece, Op 102 No 1, serves as the opening item in a recital by **Joo Yeon Choi** and pianist **Marek Szlezak**. Choi couldn't sound more different: a sweet, soft-centred cello sound that seems, in quieter passages, to draw the music in around her. The wit of this performance is understated, even straight-faced. But it works. These two artists, like Wörlich and Brauss, have solved Beethoven's puzzle on their own terms.

That only leaves the rest of the cello sonata repertoire. In essence, the Beethoven cello sonatas are experimental works; no two alike in form or character. As the founding masterpieces of a genre, they're simultaneously frustrating and liberating, and the best cello sonatas since Beethoven have rarely conformed to any one pattern. Choi pairs her Beethoven with an Impressionistic reading of Shostakovich's Sonata that feels slower than it is, and a four-movement sonata by the Korean composer Jeajoon Ryu, dating from 2011 but sounding for all the world like Debussy. Wörlich goes for Schumann, plus a real rarity – Ysaye's Sonata, Op 28, for unaccompanied cello, a sultry, overcast work that showcases his impeccable technique (and some fearsomely accurate double-stops). He ends with Britten's Cello Sonata, and that proves to be a misjudgement. It's just too pristine. When composers continually reimagine a form, performers need to be ready, chameleon-like, to adapt with them.

Take Brahms's two cello sonatas: the first alternately sombre and skittish, the second a piece of vaulting romanticism in four substantial movements. **Duo Leonore** (cellist Maja Weber and pianist Per Lundberg) go at them with a reticence and a short-breathed busyness that leaves the first feeling disjointed and the second positively congested. And for the polar opposite, take **Bruno Philippe** and **Tanguy de Williencourt**'s astonishing recital in Harmonia Mundi's new *Harmonia Nova* series: Beethoven's *Kreutzer* Sonata (in

Carl Czerny's cello transcription), Schubert's Arpeggione Sonata and a trio of Schubert song transcriptions. That's right – not a single piece here was actually written for the cello. You've got to admire their chutzpah, which translates into performances of dashing bravura, as nimble as a chamois, and all the more dazzling given that Philippe spends much of the disc somewhere in the ionosphere of his A string. With sparkling recorded sound, this is a disc to pull out at parties and amaze your friends.

Julius Klengel's Three Concertinos for cello and piano, however, will probably find their most appreciative audience among cellists. Klengel (1859–1933) is the cellist's Clementi or Czerny and these concise, nicely crafted and modestly tuneful works were written for learners. They can't often be played as elegantly as **Martin Rummel** and his accompanist (the term is valid here)

Mari Kato play them on this Naxos disc. Delightfully, Rummel is a pupil of William Pleeth – who was himself a pupil of Klengel. There's authenticity for you.

The remaining three discs under consideration each attempt to find a common thread through the genre, and **Matt Haimovitz** and pianist **Christopher O'Riley** really go to town – specifically, Moscow. The 'Troika' of their stylishly presented double-disc set comprises the three cello sonatas by Rachmaninov, Shostakovich and Prokofiev, as well as a dizzying transcription of the eponymous lollipop from Prokofiev's *Lieutenant Kijé* – one of a series of spectacular virtuoso transcriptions that range from Shostakovich's now ubiquitous Waltz No 2 to explosive versions of songs by Pussy Riot and The Beatles ('Back in the USSR', naturally).

Apparently there's a political thesis behind these choices, but what really speaks is Haimovitz and O'Riley's playing in the three sonatas. These are emotionally charged readings on the grandest scale. Haimovitz in particular plays with an articulate, vibrato-rich tone that he can refine down to an almost viola-like mellowness in, say, the *Andante* of the Rachmaninov, or send soaring and swooping (no shortage of portamento here) round O'Riley's mountains of piano sound. By comparison, **Audun Sandvik** and **Sveinung Bjelland**'s pairing of the Rachmaninov and Shostakovich on LAWO felt a little dour (their Shostakovich is the slowest of the three here), though Bjelland's piano-playing does bring some moments of illumination amid the slightly murky recorded sound.

Meanwhile, **Alexander Baillie** and **John Thwaites**'s new release on Somm does for the British cello sonata what Haimovitz and O'Riley do for the Russian – even down to the miniatures that frame the larger works (and which include the first recording of Joe Cutler's *2016 Was A Sad Year For Pop Music* – written for Baillie and Thwaites and apparently based on Prince, David Bowie and Leonard Cohen, though it sounds more like Arvo Pärt). But the sonatas – by Britten, Richard Rodney Bennett (also written for Baillie) and James MacMillan – are the real story here, and these are commanding interpretations. The pair catch Bennett's quicksilver transitions between lyricism, brilliance and angst, and Thwaites lets massive banks of overtones hang like thunderclouds in the air of MacMillan's Second Sonata. The Britten, too, receives a reading that suggests menace as well as play, with Thwaites and Baillie finding the quality of strangeness that eluded Worlitzsch. This is committed advocacy of some under-played works – and proof that as the cello sonata moves into its third century since Beethoven, it's still as individual, as unpredictable and as endlessly fascinating as the minds that create it. **G**

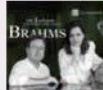
THE RECORDINGS



Beethoven et al Wks for Vc & Pf
Worlitzsch, Brauss
Genuin **GEN17463**



Beethoven et al Vc Sons
Choi, Szlezér
Dux **DUX1206**



Brahms Vc Sons Nos 1 & 2
Duo Leonore
Solo Musica **SM269**



Beethoven, Schubert Wks for Vc & Pf
Philippe, de Williencourt
Harmonia Mundi **HMN90 6109**



Klengel Cpte Concertinos
Rummel, Kato
Naxos **M 8 573793**



Various Cpsrs 'Troika'
Haimovitz, O'Riley
Pentatone **P 2 PTC5186 608**



Rachmaninov, Shostakovich Vc Sons
Sandvik, Bjelland
LAWO **LWC1131**



Various Cpsrs 'The British Cello'
Baillie, Thwaites
Somm Céleste **SOMMCD0175**

crooner, it's an unusual way to go about it. The actor is ambiguously credited with 'vocals' on the front cover; and while those do occasionally extend to some singing, for the most part (thankfully) it's just Murray doing what Murray does best: speaking classic American prose and poetry in his barrel-aged American husk of a voice. That he mostly does this over the playing of a fine piano trio will work for some and will send others screaming.

'New Worlds' is the product of a chance meeting on an aeroplane between Murray and the cellist Jan Vogler (and Vogler's cello, occupying a window seat, much to Murray's amusement). The encounter grew into a friendship and then to collaboration, where pianist Vanessa Perez and violinist Mira Wang joined them to help put together a programme inspired by all things American – from Mark Twain and Bernstein to Walt Whitman and Gershwin.

The result is a bit confusing, a bit frustrating and a bit good – probably in that order. First, the good: Vogler's superb playing can carry any amount of foolishness, and his 'The Swan' from *Carnival of the Animals* and Bach G major Prelude are delicious (even if their inclusion rather stretches the disc's all-American *raison d'être*). His colleagues too offer fine performances of the 'Blues' from Ravel's Sonata for violin and piano (wonderfully wry and caustic, though overlaid by Thurber's 'If Grant had been drinking at Appomattox') and a ferocious performance of Piazzolla's *Muerte del Ángel*.

But, however sensitive and carefully chosen the text/music pairings, I just can't get my head or ears around their simultaneous performance. Pieces intended for spoken narration like Copland's *Lincoln Portrait* tend to balance textual movement with musical stillness, and these busy, beautiful works clamour too loudly for attention.

The numbers involving singing are a mixed bag. Murray styles out 'It ain't necessarily so' all right (in a mash-up Gershwin-Heifetz arrangement, complete with Louis Armstrong impression), and even Van Morrison's 'When will I ever learn to live in God' has a certain Dylan-ish charm, but he comes badly a cropper on the challenging 'Somewhere' from *West Side Story* and the deceptively simple 'Jeanie with the light brown hair'.

Heard live, this bizarre programme might work. On disc it's just too much of a patchwork to make much sense.

Alexandra Coglan

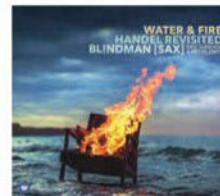
'Water & Fire'

'Handel Revisited'

Handel Chaconne, HWV310. Music for the Royal Fireworks, HWV351 (arr Sleichim/Smits). Water Music Suite, HWV348-50 (arr Sleichim/Smits)
Messiaen La Nativité du Seigneur - Le Verbe
Rebel Les élémens - La cahos (arr Sleichim)

Bl!ndman [Sax]

Warner Classics **5419 72510-5** (66' • DDD)



What do we want from our Handel, and what makes a successful modern-times transcription of a Baroque work? These have been the questions I've been asking myself since the first strains of this unique offering from the Dutch saxophone ensemble Bl!ndman [Sax] hit my ears.

The programme's main events are Handel's *Water Music* Suite and *Music for the Royal Fireworks*, arranged for saxophone quintet (two sopranos, alto, tenor and baritone) and organ by Bl!ndman [Sax] founder and saxophonist Eric Sleichim and organist Reitze Smits. The idea – initially sparked off by the timbral similarities between saxophone quintet and organ – was to imagine what Handel might have done with a saxophone quintet if he'd had such a combination of instruments to play with, meaning don't expect any Garbarek-style modern spin; these transcriptions are played absolutely straight, with the organ replacing strings and the saxophones taking care of what would have been the woodwind parts. Which is all very laudable, only the glory of these two famous suites is due in no small part to the multicoloured timbral zing of Handel's original orchestration. They weren't supposed to be about timbral homogeny. So while the churchy acoustic and the softness of all the timbres is very pleasant, it's also very one-flavour. In fact the only transcription where the addition of saxophone brings a truly interesting new dimension also happens to be the programme's only non-Baroque work: the meditation-like 'Le Verbe' from Messiaen's *La Nativité du Seigneur*, where the single saxophone floating in the air above the organ feels like a masterstroke.

Give me the originals, or give me something truly different. This is just Handel de-spiced. **Charlotte Gardner**

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Paavo Berglund

Andrew Mellor celebrates the perfectionist Finnish conductor who not only breathed life into orchestral culture in his homeland but also introduced many across the world to Sibelius

Five years before his death, Paavo Berglund (1929-2012) conducted for the last time. The ensemble was the Radio France Philharmonic Orchestra, and on the programme, naturally, was Sibelius. Specifically, it was his Fourth Symphony. Berglund talked down his connection to the composer (they met just once) and dismissed claims that Sibelius's music was a personal speciality as an invention of the record industry. But anyone who saw Berglund conduct would be hard-pushed to think of a work that better encapsulates his fearsome, granitic podium manner.

Like that symphony, Berglund was uncompromising and often intimidating. In rehearsal he was as economical with pleasantries as he was haranguing with the baton, frequently staring-down his musicians in a frown, hurling monosyllabic commands over the top of the orchestral melee. He was not in the profession to be liked, but liked he was.

Musicians enjoyed his focus on detail and balance, his apparently endless ability to hear new things in old warhorses and his encouragement of sensitivity, particularly from brass sections.

Comparing his final Sibelius performances in London (2003-06) with his earliest recorded cycle made more than three decades earlier, it is clear that there was more to Berglund's interpretations than the stern, literal approach for which he is often remembered.

Still, Berglund's reputation for focusing on the score – or his version of it – is well founded. He once travelled to Edinburgh to conduct Sibelius's *Rakastava* with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, taking with him parts marked up by the composer. It was an early

experience conducting the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra in the Seventh Symphony that prompted Berglund to create a thorough analysis of the mistakes in the printed score (in comparison with Sibelius's manuscript) and contribute to the creation of a new edition of the piece. 'Almost everything has to be corrected,' the conductor said of Sibelius in 1995.

He wasn't averse to retouching Sibelius's orchestrations to make certain elements speak more clearly.

Berglund was an orchestral musician through and through, a left-handed violinist who once played the Franck Violin Sonata switching between an adapted instrument and a standard one. He first conducted the orchestra in which he then played – the Finnish RSO – having been overheard criticising the booked maestro and subsequently challenged to prove he could do better. He went on to transform the ensemble as its chief conductor (as well as establishing an in-house football team), setting standards that some say led to a turning point in Finnish orchestral life.

His perfectionism was hard to take at times, as was his manner of communication in an age of huge transition for the profession. Although close friends talk of his openness and warmth, the composer Aulis Sallinen, sometime manager of the Finnish RSO, admitted that Berglund's reign at the orchestra was 'demanding' for both management and players. But international orchestras responded well to the more experienced Berglund's clarity and straight-talking logic – qualities that were particularly apparent in his Tchaikovsky, Shostakovich and Nielsen.

Berglund's longing not to be associated exclusively with Sibelius reflects the predicament of the composer himself

DEFINING MOMENTS

• 1952 – *Forms a new orchestra*

Already a violinist in the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, he helps to form the Helsinki Chamber Orchestra to expand the repertoire horizons of the city's instrumentalists, and becomes its first conductor

• 1962 – *Finnish chief conductorship*

Becomes chief conductor of the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra and later tours Europe and the Soviet Union with the much-improved ensemble

• 1965 – *Berglund in Britain*

Conducts a concert marking the Sibelius centenary with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra at the Royal Festival Hall in London; becomes the orchestra's chief seven years later

• 1971 – *Kullervo* firsts

HMV issues the first recording of Sibelius's *Kullervo*, by Berglund's Bournemouth SO and the Helsinki University Male Voice Choir; Berglund was also responsible for the work's first performance outside Finland, during the 1965 celebrations in London, with the same forces

• 1975 – *Principal role in Finland, then in Sweden and Denmark*

Becomes chief conductor of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, followed by appointments at the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra and the Royal Danish Orchestra

• 1996 – *Last studio recording of Sibelius symphonies*

Starts recording a final studio Sibelius symphony cycle with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, performances which take ideas of structural logic to their extreme; later live recordings from London would show more spontaneity



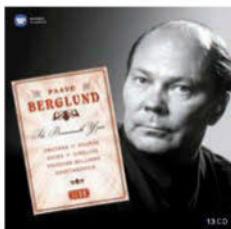
Berglund's recorded repertoire ranges from Mozart to Joonas Kokkonen via Smetana, Nielsen, Sibelius, Rachmaninov, Shostakovich and more. His concert repertoire included a sizeable chunk of British music, much of it learnt during his time as chief conductor in Bournemouth. In the UK, he took inspiration from Sir John Barbirolli and was tapped for advice by Sir Simon Rattle. When the latter conducted Sibelius's Seventh with Berglund's erstwhile Royal Danish Orchestra in 2013, it was easy to hear and see the influence (the TV broadcast is on YouTube).

Formative experiences for Berglund came during a stretch in Vienna, when contacts allowed him to sit in the Staatsoper's pit for performances conducted by Erich Kleiber and Herbert von Karajan. Ironically, his longing not to be associated exclusively with Sibelius reflects the predicament of the composer

himself, who always protested his internationalism and savoured his experiences in central Europe. Either way, Berglund was the first international Finnish conductor of the modern recording age and the musician who introduced many across the world to Sibelius's music.

He worked with the New York and Berlin philharmonics, the Cleveland and Leipzig Gewandhaus orchestras, all the major UK ensembles and notably the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, who cleaved to him in the later years and recorded his controversially 'straight' final Sibelius cycle. Berglund's legacy is difficult to overstate. He had one foot in the epochs of Sibelius and Furtwängler and another in the internet age. Despite his broad musicianship, his practical and academic work on Sibelius's music is still keenly felt among practitioners. For the rest of us, there are plenty of characteristically vivid recordings. **G**

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



The Bournemouth
Years: music by
Sibelius, Grieg,
Vaughan Williams,
Shostakovich et al
Various Orchs /
Berglund
Warner (1/14)

Instrumental



Jed Distler listens to Yury Martynov's Schubert:
'One may carp over Martynov's italicisations in the first movement of D960, but they make dramatic sense' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 90**



Jeremy Nicholas gets acquainted with the latest Van Cliburn winner:
*'Ravel's *La valse* features bombshell fortissimo chords, crystalline articulation and regimental precision'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 93**

JS Bach

English Suite No 2, BWV807. Toccata, BWV912.

Overture in the French Style, BWV831

Yulianna Avdeeva *pf*

Mirare MIR328 (64' • DDD)



After mixed recitals featuring Chopin (with whom she has been associated

since winning the 2010 Chopin Competition), Yulianna Avdeeva now turns her attention to Bach, refreshingly presenting a programme that avoids the single-genre route.

From the outset, what impresses is her physical command of the music – her D major Toccata sparkles with purpose and has a strong sense of cohesion through its contrasting sections. Avdeeva may be less subtle in her voicing than Hewitt but her way with the concluding virtuoso passage makes for a propulsive ride, while her control of the music's final slowing-down is pleasingly grandiose. Gould is always fascinating, of course, and his D major Toccata is no exception, extraordinarily dry in terms of articulation and often unhurried but mesmerising nonetheless.

Avdeeva begins with the A minor *English Suite*. Though it's technically impressive, her ornamentation doesn't always have the inevitability that you find in the finest Bachians and, compared to Perahia's deeply humane reading of the suite, she can be a bit no-nonsense (sample the closing Gigue). And while I have no quibbles with her pacing of movements, she can't yet approach Perahia's quiet pathos in the Sarabande, though the pair of Bourrées that follows is full of nicely drawn-out details.

Avdeeva ends with the B minor Ouverture, BWV831, a work I most recently heard in the DG reissue of Gieseking's Bach recordings, which, unlikely as it sounds, makes a telling comparison. Avdeeva makes much (too much?) of the sorrowing Sarabande, alongside which Gieseking seems to cut

straight to the heart of the matter, finding a simplicity that is utterly moving. She fares better in the pairs of Gavottes and Passepieds but in the Gigue sounds a tad rushed compared to Hewitt, who argues convincingly in her booklet that if taken too fast it sounds frenzied. And in their different ways both Hewitt and Gieseking find a more joyous springiness in the irrepressible final Echo than the more stolid Avdeeva. **Harriet Smith**

English Suite – selected comparison:
Perahia (11/08) (SONY) 88697 31050-2

Toccata – selected comparisons:

Gould (3/80th) (SONY) 88725 41188-2

Hewitt (10/02) (HYPE) CDA67310

Overture – selected comparison:

Hewitt (3/01) (HYPE) CDA67306

Gieseking (DG) 479 7362GB7

JS Bach

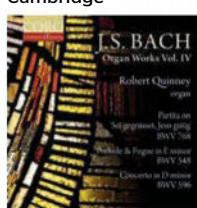
'Organ Works, Vol 4'

*An Wasserflüssen Babylon – BWV653;
BWV653b. Concerto, BWV596 (after Vivaldi).
Fantasia super Komm, Heiliger Geist, BWV651.
Komm, Heiliger Geist, BWV652. Partita on Sei
gegrüsset, Jesu gütig, BWV768. Prelude and
Fugue, BWV548. Schmücke dich, o liebe
Seele, BWV654*

Robert Quinney *org*

Coro Connections COR16157 (78' • DDD)

Played on the Metzler organ of Trinity College, Cambridge



When in the foothills of a grand Bach project, selection of works can have a significant bearing on the balance and shape of subsequent volumes. Both Masaaki Suzuki and Robert Quinney have embarked on their exceptionally promising voyages with some uncannily similar choices of repertoire, already front-ending many of the highways rather than byways of the oeuvre. Half of Quinney's Vol 4 here has appeared in one or other of Suzuki's two volumes to date, providing an enriching alternative perspective for those who sense

that here we have two Bach organists intent on projecting this music well beyond the world of the aficionado.

If Suzuki, especially in Vol 1 (BIS, 10/15 – Vol 2 is full of wonders but the tuning of the Garnier organ in Kobe is not always an easy fit), brings an experienced orchestral palate to the boundary-busting E minor Prelude and Fugue, then Quinney offers a clarity of thought that builds into just as effective momentum, with less epic abandon but with a tighter grip on the hierarchy of ideas. The prelude begins with a striking rhythmic thrust, though the fugue is a more incremental affair, even deliberately didactic at the start. There is quiet nobility at its heart, if not Suzuki's emotional risk.

In his excellent notes, Quinney talks of the problems of tracing the chronology 'because [Bach] so promiscuously combines styles and genres'. This observation could also be an emblem for Quinney's illuminating characterisation of Bach's fine concerto transcription of Vivaldi's Op 3 No 11, projecting the whim and spirit of the perpetrator but skilfully nourished by the rigours of Bach's treatment. The same is true of the chorale-based works, which are all a complete joy. The organ of Trinity College, Cambridge, offers colour, intimacy and the odd quirk, allowing the organist to explore rhetorical and abstract possibilities with delectation.

The variations – or partita – on 'Sei gegrüsset' are where Quinney's multi-referencing to Bach's promiscuity really reaps its rewards in what is one of the most convincing, invigorating and subtle accounts of this masterpiece on record. Marvel at the balance of voices, and the resulting luminosity of passing notes and dissonance. This is another exceptional Bach recital – and, crucially, for all-comers.

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

Beethoven · Nielsen · Schumann

Beethoven Variations, WoO80 **Nielsen**

Chaconne, Op 32 **Schumann** *Carnaval, Op 9*

Elisabeth Nielsen *pf*

Danacord DACOCD785 (52' • DDD)



A Chopin player of real class: Cédric Tiberghien gives compelling accounts of the Preludes and Second Piano Sonata – see review on page 88



Beethoven's chaconne-like 32 Variations in C minor and Nielsen's Op 32 Chaconne make for interesting bedfellows. But how do these single-minded structures relate to the diverse group of characters and character pieces making up Schumann's *Carnaval*? Not terribly well, programme-wise.

Be that as it may, Elisabeth Nielsen gives a forthright, tightly unified and slightly foursquare performance of the Beethoven. The fingerwork is clean but the insistent accentuations of down-beats become increasingly predictable. Still, Nielsen's *sotto voce* playing conveys a compelling, almost disembodied shimmer. She unfolds Nielsen's quirky, boundlessly creative Chaconne (inspired by Bach's Chaconne from the D minor Solo Violin Partita) in long, cohesive and steadily cumulating arcs, creating a relatively sober, goal-oriented impression in contrast to Christina Bjørkøe's greater rhythmic leeway and virtuosic extroversion (CPO, 4/09).

Carnaval proves less successful. Nielsen's rigidly dispatched dotted rhythms at the opening of the 'Préambule' lead into an

unappealingly plodding and prosaic account of the main section. The fast tempo of 'Pierrot' sounds impatient and the wide right-hand leaps in 'Arlequin' lack whimsy. But Nielsen connects with the impetuous lilt of 'Valse noble' and 'Eusebius' blossoms when the legato octaves kick in. The pianist treads too carefully in the 'Florestan'–'Coquette'–'Réplique' sequence and reduces the 'Papillons' to iron butterflies.

A gleam of suppleness (but just a gleam, mind you) peeks through 'Lettres dansantes', regressing to the stiffest, most charmless 'Chiarina' I've ever come across on disc. Nielsen sustains her fluent, headlong conception of 'Chopin' even when she follows 'tradition' by getting quiet on the repeat. 'Valse allemande' contains winsome elongations of phrase. The interloping 'Paganini' movement, if not excitingly precipitous, still makes an impact by virtue of Nielsen's strong projection of the syncopations. Like Claudio Arrau, Nielsen draws out and deliberates over 'Aveu'. She's clearly warmed for the 'Marche des Davidsbündler contre les Philistins', and imbues the reprised 'Préambule' passages with a sense of dynamism and fantasy that largely eludes this *Carnaval*. Nelson

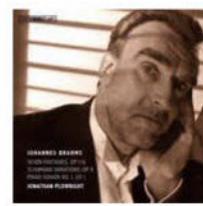
Freire's lively, imaginative *Carnaval* (Decca, 1/04) and the fleet refinement of Ivan Moravec's Beethoven Variations (Supraphon, 2/02) remain the versions of reference. **Jed Distler**

Brahms

'The Complete Solo Piano Music, Vol 5' Piano Sonata No 1, Op 1. Seven Piano Pieces, Op 116. Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann, Op 9

Jonathan Plowright *p*

BIS  BIS2147 (69' • DDD/DSD)



The qualities that have distinguished Jonathan Plowright's Brahms series for BIS since its beginning in 2013 – keen intelligence, thoughtful interpretations of striking originality and pianistic finesse – are abundantly evident in the most recent release, Vol 5. Those who have been following this journey of discovery will recognise the characteristically judicious pedalling, lean lines, structural cohesion and the antithesis of 'leaden Brahms' tempos. Those new to the series will no doubt be impressed at the insightful

wisdom and love brought to bear on pieces that, in their various ways, are among the more challenging of Brahms's solo piano music.

Any pianist tackling the C major Sonata has his/her work cut out. Characteristic of the work of a very young composer, it is over-long and over-written. One common solution is to plunge in with daredevil tempos, hoping to highlight the architecture and breadth of the future symphonist. Plowright, on the other hand, takes the work at face value, unapologetically lingering over its undeniable beauties. He creates a palpable atmosphere in the folk-inspired slow movement and dazzles in the scampering Scherzo. The finale rollicks with youthful ebullience, its sound technical assurance in the most perilous passages adding a layer of exhilaration. Among recent recordings, Alexander Melnikov (Harmonia Mundi, 5/11) poses alternative solutions using a historical instrument, though not, in my opinion, surpassing Plowright's.

The seven Capriccios and Intermezzos of the introverted Op 116 usher in a self-contained world of varied moods. Bracketed by the two D minor Capriccios, the first with its hammered cross-rhythms and the last with its fierce vehemence, they explore confiding sadness (No 2), irascibility (No 3), morning-fresh languor (No 4) and scarcely concealed panic (No 5) with unabashedly natural empathy.

It is the Variations on the first of Schumann's *Bunte Blätter*, however, that I find most admirable. Plowright captures all the Schumann-esque mercurial shifts of mood as channelled through Brahms with the candid precision of an expert photographer. In depth of sentiment and subtlety of expression, I'm not sure I've heard a better performance. Kudos to the BIS engineers for their adept capture of this compelling music-making.

Patrick Rucker

Chopin

Complete Nocturnes

Nelson Goerner *pf*

Alpha  ② ALPHA359 (108' • DDD)



It's not surprising to find Nelson Goerner, a pianist renowned for his poetry, recording Chopin's Nocturnes. Certainly, the impression left by this complete set is one of close personal engagement and a freedom that comes

with long association with this music. He's beautifully recorded too (in the Swiss venue of the Salle de Musique in La Chaux-de-Fonds), allowing a haloed sound but plenty of detail in it too.

Highlights are many: from his loving retelling of the famous D flat major, Op 27 No 2, to the simple charm with which he imbues the second of the Op 37 Nocturnes, conveying potently its mood of fragile happiness and colouring the lines with great finesse. The C minor, Op 48 No 1, unfolds with due gravitas, which contrasts tellingly with the heightened emotions of its inner section, and Goerner is a persuasive storyteller in the B major, Op 62 No 1, hinting at its enveloping sadness without becoming mired by it.

However, at times I found Goerner's freedom could be a bit of a distraction and occasionally the sense of an underlying pulse gets lost in his rhapsodic interpretations. In the very first Nocturne, for instance, the passage before the return to the main idea (at 3'42") almost loses its way. Pires here manages to combine magically ethereal shadings with a greater sense of movement.

In the third Op 9 Nocturne Perlemuter sounds ageless (despite having recorded this in his 80th year) and almost jaunty alongside most others; it's just a pity about the uningratiating Nimbus recording. While Goerner is undeniably alive to every nuance of this piece, dispatching its filigree with a quiet virtuosity, Pires finds a greater sense of sweep, of momentum, that is irresistible. And in Op 15 No 1 I wondered if Goerner was overpedalling – the textures become strangely muddied (listen to Cortot here – EMI), though perversely this is not an issue in the torrential onslaught of its middle section. Occasionally his tempos struck me as a little on the slow side, as witness Op 27 No 1, heartfelt though it undeniably is. Pires is only a degree faster but differentiates more clearly between melody and the churning accompaniment below it – though, compared to Lortie (Chandos, 6/14), Goerner is positively *allegro*.

These issues will come down to taste, of course, and Goerner ends on a high, shading the Op *posth* C minor Nocturne with tremendous beauty and gravity. **Harriet Smith**

Nocturnes – selected comparison:

Pires (10/96) (DG) 447 096-2GH2 or 477 9568GM2

Chopin

Piano Sonata No 2, Op 35. Preludes, Op 28.

Scherzo No 2, Op 31

Cédric Tiberghien *pf*

Hyperion  CDA68194 (72' • DDD)



We may currently be thinking of Cédric Tiberghien in terms of his fabulously colourful Bartók cycle or crystalline Mozart sonatas with Alina Ibragimova, but think back to his pre-Hyperion days and you may recall a couple of much-admired Chopin recordings for Harmonia Mundi. As his Preludes abundantly demonstrate, he's a Chopin player of real class. There's absolutely no grandstanding in this set, even in the most extrovert numbers.

Instead he seems to be playing to himself – listen to the quietude he finds in No 4, with its subtle gradations of *pianissimo*, or the way the music fades to nothing in the mesmerising closing moments of the Sixth. Even in the more full-throated Preludes, there's a very French-style fingeriness to Tiberghien's articulation that means textures never become heavy or stifling. Sample the tempest of the 12th or the driving 18th (where Fliter is far more highly charged). The chordal No 20 is less grandiose than some but again it's within the scale of everything else Tiberghien does. If he seems a little understated in the motoric No 22 (Fliter is especially compelling here), he gives Cortot a run for his money in No 23, in terms of sheer delicacy (and how well the piano is captured in its upper reaches by Hyperion's engineer). And in the final prelude he swaps straightforward assertive virtuosity for something altogether more compelling – a private sense of desperation, setting the seal on a refreshingly thoughtful set of Preludes.

Tiberghien's Second Sonata is impressive too: he captures the first movement's inherent instability powerfully but always allows the music to speak for itself. Just occasionally I wanted a little more firepower, à la Freire, while in the Scherzo – superbly controlled and with great clarity – few can match Hamelin's extraordinary combination of speed and effortlessness. But the melody of the Scherzo's Trio is beautifully phrased on this new set. The final two movements are particularly fine – the Funeral March so natural in its pacing, yet powerful in impact too. For the finale he is very similar in tempo to Hamelin yet quite different in effect, Tiberghien fantastically articulate, Hamelin more shadowy. Freire – a little faster and more mysterious – is my ideal, but in the end it's down to personal preference and this disc as a whole is a potent new addition to the Chopin library. **Harriet Smith**

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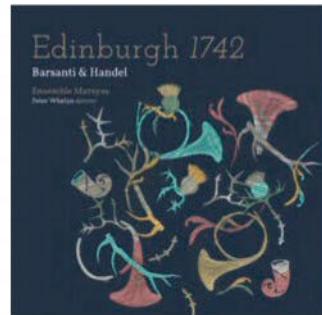
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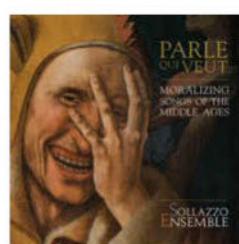
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Preludes – selected comparisons:
Fliter (11/14) (LINN) CKD475
Cortot, r1933-34 (EMI/WARN) 361541-2
Sonata No 2 – selected comparisons:
Freire (4/05th) (DECC) 478 2181DH
Hamelin (2/09) (HYPE) CDA67706

Granados

G
Goyescas. El pelele. Crepúsculo.
Jácaro. Reverie-Improvisation
José Menor *pf*
 IBS Classical (IBS2017) (77' • DDD)



Regarding Granados and *Goyescas*, José Menor is as much a scholar as a pianist.

In his booklet notes to this recording, he examines the text in detail, outlining discrepancies between manuscript, various printed editions and the composer's own piano-roll recordings, while explaining his interpretative choices. For all his erudition, however, Menor's artistry is anything but pedantic. He revels in the music's joyous exuberance and penetrates its dark introspection, embracing the dynamic extremes and contouring the labyrinthine textures to gorgeously three-dimensional effect. In the opening movement, 'Los majos enamorados', Menor's spontaneous-sounding rubatos and coaxing of inner voices are guaranteed to keep listeners on their toes. 'Coloquio en la reja' broods but never drags, with the climaxes heightened by Menor's milking the harmonic tension to just short of the breaking point.

He inflects the heel-clicking rhythm of 'El fandango del candil' with idiomatic swagger and evocative colour. 'La maja y el ruisenor' times out about a minute longer than usual, due to the pianist's rubato leeway. Yet his constant polyphonic awareness nevertheless conveys animation and movement. Similar observations characterise the suite's penultimate piece, 'El amor y la muerte' (arguably Granados's greatest piano composition), where Menor's hair-trigger response to the composer's volatile dynamic shifts and his complex variety of articulations reveal something new with each rehearing.

Menor fleshes out the disc with four splendidly played works. The previously unrecorded *Crepúsculo*'s decorative patterns flicker like fireflies in the pianist's hands, while his crisply dispatched *El pelele* rivals Alicia de Larrocha for the 'most lively ornaments' prize. Compared to the roundness and warmth of Garrick Ohlsson's recent Hyperion *Goyescas*, IBS Classical's closer microphone

placement yields a smidgen of harshness in loud moments; nothing that a few adjustments on my amplifier's graphic equaliser couldn't fix. Enthusiastically recommended. **Jed Distler**

Goyescas – selected comparison:
Ohlsson (4/12) (HYPE) CDA67846

Schubert

Piano Sonatas – No 16, D845; No 21, D960
Yury Martynov *pf*
 Melodiya (M) (2) MELCD100 2504 (82' • DDD)
 Recorded 2006



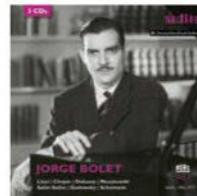
I'm not sure if these 2006 recordings have previously been released in the West but they provide my first exposure to Yury Martynov's work on the modern concert grand, as opposed to his recent fortepiano Beethoven/Liszt symphony cycle. Few hints of the latter's wild, *affettuoso* interpretation are present in these Schubert recordings, save for D845's *Andante sostenuto* variations. Martynov's basic pace is fast to the point of absurdity, where the rapid passagework is tantamount to a circus act. By contrast, Mitsuko Uchida's comparably fleet fingerwork (Decca, 2/00) is equally breathtaking, yet she channels her virtuosity towards musical ends and a stronger unified whole. On the opposite end is Martynov's slow and heavy *Moderato*, jam-packed with pretentious tenutos and emphatic accents, like a late Klemperer caricature. At the same time, the pianist's rhetorical adjustments in the Scherzo underline the composer's sudden minor-to-major mode changes and syncopated accents, yet he sometimes lurches ahead in the *Allegro ma non troppo* finale's perpetual motion patterns, rather than letting them take unpressured wing.

While one may carp over Martynov's italicisations in the *Molto moderato* first movement of D960, they make dramatic sense, notably the foreboding ritards in the strange first ending, and the development section's harmonic underpinnings. The *Andante sostenuto* gets an eloquent, expressively understated reading; perhaps not so internalised as Fleisher nor texturally so finely tuned as Perahia. Martynov's Scherzo tempo is a tad conservative for a real *Vivace*, yet it allows for his delicate shadings to register, replete with caustic left-hand jabbing accents in the Trio. The finale builds well, with a coda that packs quite a cumulative punch. My only criticism here concerns Martynov's pushing the minor-key dotted rhythms ahead, in

contrast to Richter's steadier, more powerful build. The engineering is fine, save for a metallic patina that emerges in loudest moments. **Jed Distler**

Jorge Bolet

'The RIAS Recordings, Vol 1'
Chopin Étude, Op 10 No 5. Fantaisie, Op 49.
Fantaisie-Impromptu, Op 66. Three
Impromptus. 'Minute' Waltz, Op 64 No 1
Debussy Préludes (excs) **Godowsky** Symphonic Metamorphoses on Themes by Johann Strauss - No 2, Die Fledermaus. Triakontameron - No 21, Le salon **Liszt** Années de pèlerinage - Année 1: Suisse, S160 (excs). Études d'exécution transcendante, S139 (excs). Liebesträume, S541. Rhapsodie espagnole, S254 **Moszkowski** En automne, Op 36 No 4 **Saint-Saëns**/
Godowsky Le cygne **Schumann**/Liszt Widmung, Op 25 No 1 (S566)
Jorge Bolet *pf*
 Audite (M) (3) AUDITE21 438 (3h 6' • ADD)
 Recorded 1962-73



As the booklet essay reminds us, Jorge Bolet's ascent to the top was painfully slow. Throughout the late 1940s and '50s he had a raw time of it, and it was not really until his legendary 1974 recital in Carnegie Hall (mercifully preserved for posterity) that he was finally admitted to the ranks of the all-time greats.

Almost everything by Bolet is worth acquiring, but this collection is particularly valuable, coming from the period just after he had finally attracted some attention for his Liszt-playing (on behalf of Dirk Bogarde) in the 1960 biopic *Song Without End*. Few pianophiles, I suspect, will be aware of the existence of these radio broadcasts from the early 1960s (the sole exception being the 1973 Chopin Fantasy) recorded in Berlin, licensed from Deutschlandradio and presented here by kind permission of Donald Manildi of the International Piano Archives at the University of Maryland.

Disc 1 opens with Bolet on top form: the first six numbers from the first book (*Suisse*) of *Années de pèlerinage*, concluding with an intense account of 'Vallée d'Obermann' that ends more in despairing torment than rapturous ecstasy. The piano and sound (1963, in the Siemensvilla) are superior to those in the selection of six of the *Études d'exécution transcendante* that follows (1962, RIAS Funkhaus). Bolet was at his best in front of an audience and, as with the *Années de pèlerinage*, though there is none, there's a 'live broadcast' feel to the playing. Despite



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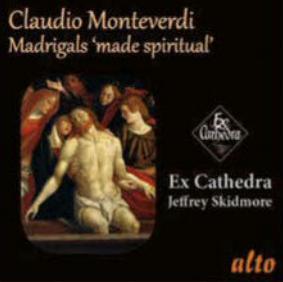


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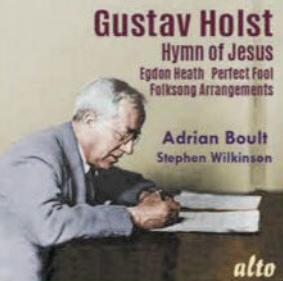


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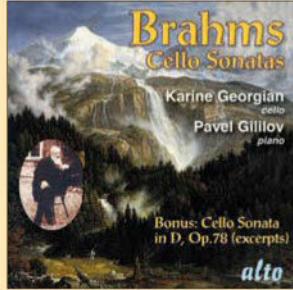
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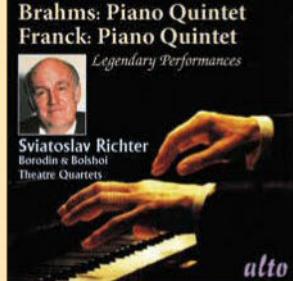
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GRAMOPHONE Focus

SCHUBERT REVISITED

Jed Distler listens to Paul Badura-Skoda's Schubert piano sonatas, recorded in the late 1960s but incorporating later tweaks and remakes



Paul Badura-Skoda's Schubert is repackaged complete with alternative versions

Paul Badura-Skoda's 1967-68 Schubert piano sonata cycle for RCA Victor first appeared in 1971 on 13 LPs (12/71), and was later repackaged into four smaller individual multi-disc volumes. For these sets Badura-Skoda re-recorded five of the sonatas plus the Scherzo of the A major Sonata, D959. Now all of the recordings – originals and remakes alike – appear for the first time on CD in an original jacket-style box-set. Badura-Skoda, who turned 90 on October 6, played an active role in the remastering process. At his request, a wrongly printed and recorded F was replaced with a correct G in D845's slow movement (bar 114), while slight tempo modifications – compared to the LP pressings – were effected in several movements. Purists may cry foul; but if an artist wants to use technology to tweak past discographical indiscretions, so be it. Besides, you still have the original LPs. That is, if you can find them, although RCA's noisy and wafer-thin Dynaflex LP pressings weren't exactly the stuff of audiophile dreams.

Speaking of tweaking, Badura-Skoda took it upon himself either to complete, fill out or reconstruct the dozen-odd sonatas that Schubert didn't finish. In certain instances the pianist adopts (or, shall we say, kidnaps?) new movements in the form of isolated pieces written around the same time as the sonatas to which they were added, while composing his

own completions to movements existing in either fragmentary or unfinished form. His own completion of the first movement of the F minor, D625, for example, is more inventive and developed than the reconstruction printed by Universal Edition and favoured by many pianists. To compensate for the lack of a slow movement, Badura-Skoda incorporates Schubert's *Adagio*, D505, a convincing and idiomatic addition. I'm still not sure if the 'doubtful' Scherzo and *Allegretto molto*, D506, convincingly complete the two-movement torso of the E minor, D566, yet Badura-Skoda's completion of D840's unfinished finale references the sonata's first-movement theme with stylish aplomb.

It must be said, however, that the performances are variable. In *Gramophone*'s original review of the LP set the late Joan Chissell accurately observes that Badura-Skoda 'conveys the music's relaxed lyricism, its basic intimacy, with an endearing simplicity', yet also chides the pianist's insufficiently taut rhythm at times. Both recordings of D850's exhilarating first movement emerge choppy and heavy-handed, while myriad underlinings and elongations of phrase throughout the three great posthumous sonatas (D958, 959 and 960) often yield sectionalised results that lack in both unity and cumulative power. The pianist's expressive pokes and nudges throughout D959's *Allegro* never manage to move or shape this imposing edifice, although, in fairness, the aforementioned

1971 Scherzo remake is simpler and steadier in comparison to its slower and fussier 1968 antecedent. In the B flat's *Molto moderato* first movement, it could be argued that Badura-Skoda's unorthodox speeding-up of the first ending's dotted two-note phrases supposedly reinforces the passage's abrupt interruptive intent. But unless you really dig into the keys, as Barry Douglas does in his absorbing Chandos recording (5/14), this particular gesture sounds merely eccentric. Conversely, the G major D894's protracted first movement (with its long exposition repeat intact) makes less sprawling an impression due to Badura-Skoda's firmer basic pulse, which allows him to deviate without losing sight of the proverbial big picture.

The pianist generally fares best in smaller-scale works. In the slight yet charming A flat Sonata, D557, Badura-Skoda brings an appropriate gravitas to the second movement's *Alla marcia*, while pointing up the guileless extroversion in the outer movements of the E major, D157. Also notice his careful control of the detached left-hand accompaniment and difficult-to-voice legato right-hand octaves at the outset of D537's central *Allegretto*, whose theme re-emerges in grander guise via D959's Rondo finale. The cascading runs in the finale of the A minor, D784, may not match Sviatoslav Richter's breathless sheen, yet Badura-Skoda's sharply differentiated dynamic contrasts hit home.

My late American colleague Harris Goldsmith singled out the A major, D664, as one of this cycle's high points. I couldn't agree more, although Badura-Skoda's 1971 'do-over' is slightly more self-aware in regard to accents and agogics than in the warmer, more fluent and better-engineered 1968 version. Out of curiosity, I pulled down Badura-Skoda's very first recording of this work on a Westminster LP from c1952, and I found this long out-of-print performance even more spontaneous and lyrically disarming. In short, there's no questioning Badura-Skoda's love and devotion on Schubert's behalf then and now, although my mixed response can be summed up in Nanki-Poo's immortal phrase from *The Mikado*: 'modified rapture'. **G**

THE RECORDING



Schubert Complete Piano Sonatas

Paul Badura-Skoda

RCA Victor 5 88985 39549-2

a number of finger slips and smudges, the performances (but not the piano or sound quality) are preferable to the selection of nine Bolet recorded for RCA in 1958 or the 1970 *Ensaya* complete set recorded in Spain.

The second CD is the USP of the set. Apart from superb versions of some Bolet favourites (*Rhapsodie espagnole*, 'Widmung' and Moszkowski's 'En automne'), there are all three of Liszt's *Notturnos*, the set which concludes with the ubiquitous *Liebesträum* No 3 and demonstrates why we rarely hear Nos 1 and 2. Best of all are the three Godowsky numbers – a luminously voiced 'The Swan', 'Le salon' (a little charmer from *Triakontameron*, still in Bolet's repertoire in 1988, two years before his death) and, most desirable of all, his *Die Fledermaus Symphonic Metamorphosis*. This comes, unusually, with all but two repeats observed (he cuts one of these in his scarcely less masterly live account from 1973 on Marston) and, despite a rather exposed incorrect F natural instead of G flat at 7'27", goes to the head of my leader board in this heady concoction – nearly 11 minutes of truly great piano-playing.

The same can be said of the F minor Fantasy that opens disc 3 (featuring more Bolet favourites), a muscular, magisterial rendition so characteristic of this great artist yet by no means devoid of introspection and sensitivity. All four of Chopin's Impromptus follow, a real joy (listen to the rapid scale passages towards the close of No 2) even if I prefer No 3 at a slightly quicker pace. The 'Minute' Waltz ends in cheeky thirds (à la Hofmann). Bolet then moves to Debussy and a selection of four from each of the two books of *Préludes*. No wishy-washy Impressionism (despite the veiled, beautifully graded colours in 'La cathédrale engloutie') but a sequence of individually defined tone poems that I personally responded to more readily than versions by some Debussy specialists. Try 'Feux d'artifice', which concludes this essential addition to any pianophile's collection. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Yekwon Sunwoo

'Cliburn Gold 2017'

Grainger Ramble on the Last Love-Duet from *Der Rosenkavalier* **Hamelin** Toccata on 'L'homme armé' **Haydn** Piano Sonata, HobXVI:48 **Rachmaninov** Piano Sonata No 2, Op 36 **Ravel** La valse **Schubert/Liszt** Litanei, D343 (S562 No 1)

Yekwon Sunwoo *pf*

Decca Gold *®* 481 5527 (60' • DDD)

Recorded live at Bass Performance Hall, Fort Worth, Texas, May 28 & 30 and June 3, 2017



The Van Cliburn International Competition does not have a great history of choosing winners. The 28-year-old Yekwon Sunwoo from South Korea was by no means everyone's choice for the gold medal at this year's play-off. I did not hear any of the other rounds, though I am told his concerto performance (Rachmaninov No 3) was sensational. I have just this debut disc to go on and can only 'speak as I find'. It opens with a technically awesome account of *La valse* with bombshell *fortissimo* chords, crystalline articulation and a keyboard attack of regimental precision. It is very fast and very powerful and has the desired effect on the audience who, predictably, greet its conclusion with effusive whoops.

Perhaps, I thought, as I sat there like a stone, there would be something to engage my emotions beyond respect for the highly drilled fingers and years of dedicated hard work. It was not to be. Here was Percy Grainger's sweet *Ramble on Rosenkavalier* (how one longed for the soft caress and improvisatory charm of the composer's own recording) and, later, Liszt's transcription of Schubert's 'Litanei', bland and anonymous.

In between came Marc-André Hamelin's specially commissioned piece, a terrifyingly difficult toccata treatment of the French secular song 'L'homme armé', mother's milk to Sunwoo, who dispatched its scintillating pages with relish. This was followed by the little two-movement C major Sonata of Haydn, HobXVI:48, a favourite of Hamelin's, as it happens, who plays it with infinitely greater delicacy and wit, and without any pronounced pedal thumps.

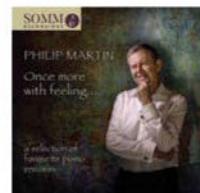
The recital ends with Rachmaninov's Second Sonata (the 1931 version, if you are interested; the record label assumes you are not, since the booklet is silent on the matter, as it is on all the other music and composers featured). As a heartless finger-fest and note-perfect delineation of the score, Sunwoo's account is hard to beat and he joins the now long list of brilliant Asian-born American-trained pianists undistinguishable one from another in character and sound. **Jeremy Nicholas**

'Once more with feeling ...'

Albéniz Cordoba **Cervantes** Cuban Dance No 6 **Chabrier** Dix Pièces pittoresques – No 10, **Scherzo-valse** **Debussy** Arabesque No 1 **Fauré** Nocturne No 6, Op 63 **Gershwin** I got rhythm.

The man I love Godowsky *Triakontameron* – No 1, **Nocturnal Tangier** **Grieg** Lyric Pieces, Op 43 – No 1, **Butterfly**; No 6, **To the Spring** **Joplin** Solace **P Martin** Two Jazz Pieces. **New York Nights**. Night Piece for Julia. **The Zodiac** **Rachmaninov** Oriental Sketch **Satie** Gnossienne No 3 **Schumann** Waldszenen, Op 82 – No 9, **Abschied** **Severac** Stances à Madame de Pompadour **Tansman** Suite variée – Ostinato ritmico **Philip Martin** *pf*

Somm Céleste *®* SOMMCD0176 (79' • DDD)



Philip Martin is a fine pianist, as anyone will attest who has in their collection his invaluable account of the complete works of Gottschalk, the fascinating disc of Henri Herz solos and, more pertinent to the matter in hand, his 2002 cornucopia entitled 'The Maiden's Prayer and other gems from an old piano stool'. This latter featured a collection of 24 once-popular pieces ranging from Sinding's *Rustle of Spring* and Nevin's *Narcissus* to Badarzewska's deathless eponymous title. All these were for Hyperion and boasted at least one important quality missing on Martin's new album: lovely, rounded, full piano sound.

'Once more with feeling ... a selection of favourite piano encores' is billed as a 70th-birthday tribute to the Irish pianist and composer. The best present I could have wished for Martin was a different piano, or at least one that sounded more agreeable. This one, wherever it was recorded (the disc merely says 'Upton-on-Severn'), is a less than top-notch instrument located, so it sounds, in someone's front room. Sad to say, with the first bars of Debussy's Arabesque No 1 which opens the disc, it is the piano sound that commands attention rather than the performance and the music itself. It is an even greater shame because the selection of 23 pieces is imaginative and whimsical – typical, in fact, of this pianist. As well as welcome discoveries such as Déodat de Séverac's *Stances à Madame de Pompadour* and Tansman's 'Ostinato ritmico' from his *Suite variée* of 1954, Martin includes seven short pieces of his own, including 'Boogie Woogie' inspired by memories of the Trinidadian-born Winifred Atwell and her boogie-woogie hits from the 1950s. Great fun.

If Grieg's 'Butterfly' and Joplin's *Solace* are a little heavy-handed for my taste, piano buffs will relish the repertoire on offer and perhaps accept more readily than me the aural deficiencies of this homespun production. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Tarik O'Regan

A composer who rose to prominence through his choral music but now excels across many disciplines, by Evan Dickerson

Tarik O'Regan first captured my attention in 2005 with a single song – a setting of Mallarmé's poem *Sainte*, which won that year's vocal category of the British Composer Awards. The sense of lyrical line and feeling for the text proved instantly arresting and distinguished itself in the company of a varied collection of new French song on the Metier label.

With more than 100 works, around 30 albums featuring his music and an international performance history of growing prominence to his credit thus far, O'Regan is his own man – something that becomes clear after spending even a little time with his music. Unlike some who plough a single furrow repeatedly across an oeuvre, refining essential characteristics into ever finer detail, O'Regan delights the enquiring listener through exploring the breadth of his cultural erudition within his music.

O'Regan has acknowledged several influences on his work: Renaissance vocal writing, the music of North Africa, 1960s and 1970s British rock bands, jazz and composers including Copland, Harris and Barber. Britten and early Schoenberg (O'Regan's idiom remains solidly tonal) also come to mind, as does a fondness for Harrison Birtwistle's sense of timing.

A fascination with rhythm and an interest in percussive writing have formed a central core to much of his work

Born in London on New Year's Day, 1978, O'Regan grew up in Croydon and spent some of his early childhood in Morocco, where his mother was born, and Algeria. Having learnt to read music while playing the drums for a school production of *West Side Story*, his interest in composition was encouraged at the Junior Department of the Royal College of Music. A fascination with rhythm and an interest in percussive writing have formed a central core to much of his work. Undergraduate study at Pembroke College, Oxford, and a master's degree under Robin Holloway in Cambridge followed. While a postgraduate, O'Regan was appointed composer-in-residence at Corpus Christi College and began a four-year stint as classical recordings reviewer for *The Observer*.

By 2010, fully resident stateside, O'Regan wrote and presented the BBC Radio 4 documentary *Composing New York*, in which he explored the rich heritage of European composers working in this vibrant city. *Composing LA* followed in 2012.

O'Regan recalls his Oxbridge education as being 'very history-based', but also acknowledges the welcome contradiction of 'stuffy' college choirs' acceptance of new repertoire. Despite being 'a terrible singer' himself and not participating in the choral tradition, it was this scene that offered him his first prominent compositional opportunities.



Now resident in New York, O'Regan's musical influences are exceptionally diverse

Four Mixed-Voice Settings (1998-2000) explores the textures of mixed-voice writing in a way that emphasises their inner luminescence, often reliant upon economy of means. The *Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis* variations (2000), for double choir and four vocal soloists, echoes the Renaissance practice of alternating sections of chant and polyphony; O'Regan's innovative addition is to have a solo cello part that elaborates material taken from both elements. *Dorchester Canticles* (2004), written for performance alongside Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*, marks O'Regan's transition from the UK to New York through the Manhattan-driven rapid toccata rhythms that conclude it. *Threnody* (2004; which also forms part of *Triptych*) is influenced by the music of Copland and Barber.

There are works that are apparently unrelated to any others, but that doesn't diminish their importance or impact. *Acallam na senórach* (roughly translated as 'An Irish Colloquy') (2010) is one such work. The text, one of the longest-surviving works of medieval Irish literature, meets the unlikely instrumental pairing of guitar and Irish *bodhrán*. It's typical of O'Regan to draw together opposites – here, pagan and Christian – and diverse cultures rather than maintain any artificial separation. A demanding piece to perform, it's intricate and absorbing, creating a cathartic experience when heard in a single sitting. Meanwhile, *A Celestial Map of the Sky* (2014), written for the quincentenary of the Manchester Grammar School, uses propulsive syncopated orchestral and choral rhythms and thematic invention to fuse the inspiration taken from visual and philosophical views on astronomy, from Albrecht Dürer's 1515 woodcuts of the celestial heavens to Persian and European philosophy regarding man's relationship to the stars.

Listening to O'Regan's growing instrumental output, I am struck by the fact that concision of expression is as much a characteristic as it is in his vocal writing. There's



TARIK O'REGAN FACTS

Born in London, January 1, 1978
Resides in New York City
Studied at Junior Department Royal College of Music, London; Pembroke College, Oxford; and with Robin Holloway at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge
Influences include Copland, Harris, Barber and Britten; North African music; 1960s and 1970s British rock bands; jazz
Current appointments include honorary fellow of Pembroke College, Oxford; composition teacher at Rutgers University; senior adviser to the Center for Ballet and the Arts at New York University; and composer-in-residence with Pacific Chorale, California

intentioned but lacking in depth. O'Regan banishes this feeling through music of (to quote British composer Joseph Phibbs) 'infectious energy, lyrical beauty, and consummate craftsmanship'. When it comes to O'Regan's instrumental works, a variety of textures and colours are explored with a knowing wit and sophistication. *Rai* (2006) and *Chaâbi* (2012) draw respectively on Moroccan and Algerian folk dance forms grounded in modal rather than tonal language. While not ethnographic in the strict sense, they carry the feeling of remembrances of music heard in his youth – hence they give the impression of constantly shifting tableaux. That said, O'Regan is unafraid to take his cue from the most august of sources should the occasion demand it. *Latent Manifest* (2010) for full orchestra, premiered at the BBC Proms, is an effervescent fantasia-like elaboration or 'transcription' of 'intimations' (to use O'Regan's own description) found in the *Adagio* of Bach's Solo Violin Sonata No 3.

More recently, O'Regan has ventured fully into operatic writing, his aim being to delve into the psyches of the main protagonists. *Heart of Darkness* (2011) sets an English-language libretto by artist Tom Phillips based on the novella by Joseph Conrad; the single-act chamber work audaciously presents Conrad's narrative of the young adventurer Marlow in Africa alongside the writer's later-life denials of his own racism. This inner psychodrama gives the work its dramatic tension, highlighted further by the contrast of sensuous instrumental scoring with the unavoidable presence of the driving electric guitar bass lines.

The Wanton Sublime (2013), a 30-minute chamber monodrama for mezzo-soprano and amplified ensemble, also examines the duality of personality, this time in relation to the Virgin Mary. Its fragmentary accompanying music contrasts the spiritual (evoked particularly by the writing for strings and solo flute) and the earthly (represented by the electric guitars and percussion), thus providing an eclectic

backdrop against which the solitary Mary explores her inner battle between the divine and the human.

Music for dancing to has also produced two notable works. *Louder than Words* (2014), written for the Sydney Dance Company, utilises O'Regan's stand-alone vocal piece *Scattered Rhymes* (2006) as its starting point; the three movements are interspersed with three new electronic movements written jointly with composer Nick Wales. The new movements draw on sampled sections taken from the 2007 recording of *Scattered Rhymes* (Harmonia Mundi) as well as poetry readings in Latin, English and medieval Italian, creating an atmospheric fusion of text and textures that's both ancient and modern. *Mata Hari* (2015), a ballet scored for full orchestra, draws heavily on the American minimalists, with Britten's ballet *The Prince of the Pagodas* also detectable as an influence. O'Regan's score deftly underlines the complex central persona through its blending of lyrical writing and the rhythmic interaction of its intricate orchestral layers.

Choral and stage works will continue to feature prominently: *Mata Hari* was recently revived in Amsterdam, and O'Regan's first full-length opera, *The Phoenix*, will be premiered by Houston Grand Opera in spring 2019. Its subject is the extraordinary life of Lorenzo da Ponte, and it boasts a top-notch cast, with Luca Pisaroni and Thomas Hampson singing the parts of the younger and older Da Ponte respectively. If his deployment of the full range of orchestral forces in previous works is anything to go by, one can expect a translucence of texture fused with a keen ear for specific sonorities. If the latter sound carefully crafted – taking their impulse from fragmentary gestures – and deliberately contrasted it is because that is what O'Regan intends, but in doing so he offers his listener something curiously fresh and unaffected. **G**

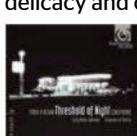
TARIK O'REGAN ON RECORD

Recordings reflecting the range of O'Regan's output



Three Motets from Sequence for St Wulfstan. Magnificat and Nunc dimittis: Variations for Choir. Two Upper-Voice Settings. Dorchester Canticles. Four Mixed-Voice Settings. Colimaçon
 Clare College Choir, Cambridge / Timothy Brown; with Rafal Jezierski vc Adrian Spillet perc Helen Tunstall hp James McVinnie org Collegium (7/06)

An inviting collection of early choral works performed with delicacy and clarity.



Had I not seen the sun. The Ecstasies Above. Threshold of Night. Tal vez tenemos tiempo. Care Charming Sleepe. Triptych. I had no time to hate
 Company of Voices; Conspirare / Craig Hella Johnson Harmonia Mundi (A/08)

Nominated for both best classical album and best choral performance in the 2009 Grammys, this album showcases O'Regan's later eclectic approach to choral writing.



A Celestial Map of the Sky. Latent Manifest. Rai. Chaâbi. Fragments from Heart of Darkness
 The Manchester Grammar School Choir; Hallé Youth Choir; Hallé Orchestra / Mark Elder; Jamie Phillips NMC (4/17)

This debut recording of O'Regan's orchestral works demonstrates his instrumental sureness of touch.

Vocal



Tim Ashley revels in a tribute to singer-songwriter Barbara: 'Jane Birkin's "Là-bas" is vulnerable and exquisite, her voice hovering above shivery, minimalist tintinnabulations' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 104**



Malcolm Riley listens to contemporary Marian motets: 'In Cheryl Frances-Hoad's *Gaude et laetare* the bells ring out in a tour de force of rousing harmonic daring' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 105**

JS Bach

Cantatas - No 101, *Nimm von uns, Herr, du treuer Gott*; No 103, *Ihr werdet weinen und heulen*; No 115, *Mache dich, mein Geist, bereit*
Collegium Vocale Gent / Philippe Herreweghe
PHI (LPH027 (62' • DDD • T/t)



Another gift of relatively unfamiliar Bach cantatas from Philippe Herreweghe allows us to drop in on the composer's second Leipzig cycle, of 1724-25. *Nimm von uns, Herr, du treuer Gott* is a penitential piece acclaiming God's forgiveness in the light of the wretchedness of our sin. Predominantly in the minor key, its core tension between the fear of God's wrath and the more comfortable feeling that it won't occur is set out in the way nagging slurred-note pairs undermine the certainty of the chorale melody. Two fine arias and an intense soprano-alto duet reminding us of the bitterness of Christ's sacrifice are further highlights of this affecting work.

Mache dich, mein Geist, bereit explores another opposition, this time between complacency and the danger of Satan's blandishments. The first chorus appears carefree, but an alto aria – a kind of interrupted slumber song – soon establishes the need to be wary, and a superbly crafted aria for soprano, flute and piccolo cello is a fervently tender entreaty to contrition. Only a few months after the *St John Passion*, and with the *St Matthew* not far in the future, these are superb examples of their composer's expressive powers. *Ihr werdet weinen und heulen* makes less of an impression, though its message of sorrow returning to joy in God is articulated in fine style in the opening chorus, with its drooping vocal lines and perky piccolo part.

There is not much to be said about the performances that has not been remarked already about these artists, all of whom are rightly lauded for their Bach. Herreweghe blends and balances his forces with customary finesse, and paces his readings

with faultless taste and skill, while the soloist team seems to be his first choice these days, understandably in the light of their precision and expressive focus. If you want dramatic punch in this music look elsewhere, but for sheer beauty of thought and execution, Herreweghe is still a main man. **Lindsay Kemp**

JS Bach

Magnificat, BWV243a^a. **Cantata No 151**, *Süßer Trost, mein Jesus kommt*^b. **Mass**, BWV233^c
^a**Charlotte Ashley**, ^b**Angela Hicks**, ^c**Hannah Morrison** sop, ^a**Eleanor Minney** contr, ^{a,b}**Reginald Mobley** counter, ^b**Hugo Hymas** ten, ^c**Gianluca Buratto**, ^{a,b}**Jake Muffett** basses **Monteverdi Choir**; **English Baroque Soloists** / **Sir John Eliot Gardiner**
Soli Deo Gloria (SDG728 (74' • DDD • T/t)



This is Gardiner's second recording of the Christmas Cantata No 151, which dates from Bach's golden period of cantata composition, two years after the *Magnificat*: even more exquisitely refined and restfully possessed of consoling authority than his account from the 2000 Cantata Pilgrimage (12/06). Exemplified by the unselfconscious innocence of Angela Hicks in the cantata's long opening aria, Gardiner has more and more tended to cast and coach singers in a vein of expression peeled of traditionally soloistic or assertive methods of delivery: here, the text is everything.

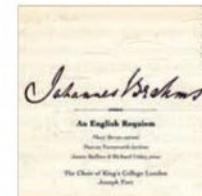
With the E flat version of the *Magnificat*, the tension is turned up over its more familiar D major cousin as well as the pitch, like retuning a fiddle, though the choral work is remarkably relaxed in what amounts to 10 of the trickiest minutes in Bach's entire output. The soloists are all appreciably youthful in tone, especially alto Eleanor Minney ('Et exultavit') and soprano Hannah Morrison ('Quia respexit'). Reginald Mobley and Hugo Hymas combine to an especially affecting degree in 'Et misericordia'.

Even if the members of the Monteverdi Choir aren't singing off the book, as they and other vocal ensembles have done in recent years, they sound liberated from the score. The fugues are tight without being regimented; indeed, Gardiner's old recording sounds a little stiff by comparison, even if it set a standard at the time which this new recording supersedes. The alien, harmonically disconcerting nature of the four interpolated movements is emphasised by placing them in a different, more distant perspective. The chorus is also slightly recessed in the parody F major Mass, the better to uncover busy instrumental detail such as a bounding pair of horns and lovely obbligato contributions from violinist Kati Debretzeni and oboist Rachel Chaplin.

Peter Quantrill

Brahms

An English Requiem
(*Ein deutsches Requiem*, Op 45)
Mary Bevan sop, **Marcus Farnsworth** bar, **James Baillieu**, **Richard Uttley** pf, **The Choir of King's College London / Joseph Fort**
Delphian (DCD34195 (65' • DDD • T/t)



Listeners familiar with *Ein deutsches Requiem* may experience some cognitive dissonance from the outset, hearing the closed English 'are' vowel against the open and more singable 'sind'. Such 'minor infelicities' are acknowledged by the Brahms scholar Michael Musgrave in his valuable booklet essay and gradually dispelled by a number of factors: the neat expedient of printing the original German opposite the Victorian-era text used here; the sweetly modulated young choral voices; and the spacious but secular ambience captured by Delphian in the hall of Trinity School, Croydon.

The school's own Steinway D is placed front and centre by the engineers, and a magnificently even-tempered piano it is too, with a rolling bass that supplies some



The Choir of King's College London and Joseph Fort bring a calm and noble strength to Brahms's *Requiem* in English

of the bottom-end resonance missing from the choir's disposition of 11.5.4.6. In the *Requiem*'s heaven-storming moments, this is a serious drawback: the third-movement fugue cannot be launched in so matter-of-fact a fashion without undercutting its Handelian dignity and significance as a structural capstone. Joseph Fort otherwise leads a well-paced account that achieves a calm and noble strength of expression in the symmetrical outer pillars. He cultivates some keenly communicative diction, though I can't help hearing 'incorruptible' rendered as 'in a runcible': perhaps in Brahms's uncertain hereafter, spoons will be provided.

Like other conductors of the 'London version' of the *Requiem*, among them Harry Christophers, Laurence Equilbey and Simon Halsey (the best of the bunch, I thought, in July 2011), Fort has prepared his own performing score from the composer's four-hand reduction of the entire score, removing most of the choral doubling and reinserting some instrumental felicities here and there. James Baillieu and Richard Uttley outshine the competition, however, with playing of admirable power and refinement, in no danger of swamping the formidable King's soprano section and sustaining a rhapsodic *cantabile* that is not

quite matched by the close-miked soloists. However, as Brahms's *English Requiem*, the disc deserves a place in the catalogue to itself. **Peter Quantrill**

Duruflé · Howells · Vaughan Williams

Duruflé Requiem, Op 9 **Howells Requiem**

Vaughan Williams Valiant-for-Truth

Kirsten Sollek *mez* **Richard Lippold** *bar* **Myron Lutzke** *vc* **Frederick Teardo** *org* **Saint Thomas Choir of Men & Boys, Fifth Avenue, New York / John Scott**

Resonus **RES10200** (63' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded 2010



Former St Paul's Cathedral music director John Scott worked at Saint Thomas Church, Fifth Avenue, until his early death in 2015. While in this role he made a number of recordings with the church's men and boys' choir, which have been posthumously released by Resonus. The series has been a varied and infinitely rich one, and sadly this recording of the *Requiems* by Duruflé and Howells will be the final volume.

But what can Scott and his forces bring to these two often-recorded choral classics? The first thing to strike you, as in so many recordings from this series, is the quality of the trebles. The larger forces of Saint Thomas's Choir (24 trebles are credited here, compared to the usual Oxbridge 16 or even Westminster Cathedral's 20) give the sound greater stability and make for a glossier, smoother blend. Listen to the Howells alongside the benchmark recording by Robinson and St John's Cambridge (Naxos, 1/00) and the Americans have a much more rounded, more corporate tone. Whether you prefer this to the more pitted, characterful English sound is a matter of taste.

In many ways the Saint Thomas Choir straddle the divide between choirs of men and boys and mixed chamber and chapel choirs. It's hard to look past Layton and Trinity Cambridge's superb recording of the Howells (Hyperion, 6/12) on the one hand or Robinson's on the other, but this new recording charts a nice middle ground in terms of breadth of sound and tone quality. The use of trebles feels particularly appropriate, given the work's composer-driven association with the death of his nine-year-old son Michael.



RENÉ JACOBS

RIAS KAMMERCHOR

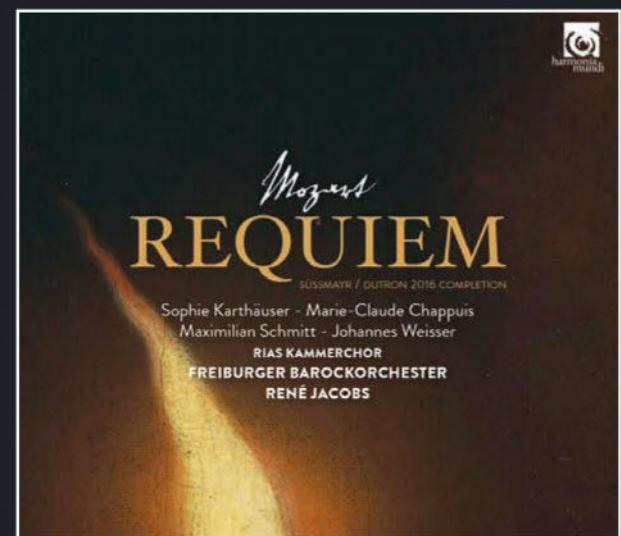
FREIBURGER BAROCKORCHESTER

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART
REQUIEM
SÜSSMAYR/DUTRON 2016

SOPHIE KARTHÄUSER, MARIE-CLAUDE CHAPPUIS
MAXIMILIAN SCHMITT, JOHANNES WEISSE

1791 A busy year for Mozart who, when he received a commission for a Requiem, was already working on *Die Zauberflöte* and had a deadline to deliver *La clemenza di Tito*.

Everyone knows what happened next: the commission postponed, exhaustion and death, a work left unfinished and which, after several composers were approached, was finally completed by Süssmayr. This version gradually became established as the closest to Mozart's intentions, but is not free of faulty part-writing and orchestration. In 2016 a young French composer, Pierre-Henri Dutron, persuaded René Jacobs to perform his own revision of the *Requiem* completed by Süssmayr. This new version was created with great success in a series of five concerts around Europe in November 2016. We now present its first studio recording, released exclusively on harmonia mundi.



CD HMM 902291

The Duruflé (recorded here in the arrangement for choir, organ and cello) is equally strong, carefully paced and phrased under Scott's direction to give the plainchant real direction and flow – no brooding or lingering here. The freshness persists throughout this recording, even in the darker moments of the 'Libera me' and 'Domine Jesu Christe', a product of the bright, forward vowels and crisp but never affected diction.

It's hard to imagine a finer musical farewell to Scott and a stronger final volume in his long choral legacy.

Alexandra Coghlan

Graun

Weihnachtsoratorium

Monika Mauch sop Marion Eckstein contr
Georg Poplutz ten Raimund Nolte bass Arcis
Vocalists, Munich; L'Arpa Festante Baroque
Orchestra / Thomas Gropper
Oehms  OC1876 (79' • DDD)



An oratorio by Carl Heinrich Graun on a Christmas subject is preserved in an anonymous manuscript copy in the Library of Congress. Its date and origins are uncertain, but perhaps it originated during his early career at the court of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, where he worked from 1725 until 1735 (before he became Frederick the Great's favourite opera composer in Berlin). Thomas Gropper conducts a disciplined reading by Munich's well-drilled semi-professional choir Arcis-Vocalisten and L'Arpa Festante. Chorale harmonisations tend to be literal and unexceptional, and the centrepiece of the oratorio is an uncomplicated setting of the famous chorale 'Wie soll ich dich empfangen'; by the end of its seventh verse one cannot help yearning for something more like Bach's extraordinary treatments of the same tune.

However, Graun's finely crafted arias are performed by accomplished soloists. Georg Poplutz sings with stylistic and sincerity (albeit occasionally a little strain): 'Erfüllte mich, du holdes Wesen' has the distinctive colour of two bassoons, and there is a five-string violoncello piccolo doubling the tenor voice throughout 'Ew'ger Sohn, erhaltner Segen'. Raimund Nolte's searing 'Abgrund krache, Tod erzittert' conjures pseudo-operatic turbulence, whereas there is serene pastoral delicacy in Monika Mauch's 'Zeit und Stunde sind erfüllt' (featuring attractive *concertante* flutes). Mauch and Marion Eckstein combine

gorgeously in the duet 'Herr, im Frieden will ich sterben' (featuring a gentle pair of horns) – moments like this make it easy to admire Graun's masterful utilisation of varied instrumentation and melodicism. Oehms' omission of the libretto (let alone an English translation) is unhelpful.

David Vickers

Ludford

Ludford Missa Dominica interspersed with
Anonymous Alma redemptoris mater. Angelus ad virginam. Gaude, gaude, gaude Maria. There is no rose of swych vertu **Lack Candlemas**
Leighton The Lord is my shepherd
Trinity Boys Choir; Handbell Choir Gotha /
David Swinson with Lewis Brito-Babapulle org
Rondeau Production  ROP8001 (79' • DDD • T/t)



Ludford's Lady Masses stand apart from his more widely recorded Festal Masses for their alternatim settings and unusual three-part scoring. For this recording, composer and musicologist Graham Lack has realised an organ part through faburden and extempore accompaniment techniques that allows *Missa Dominica* to be sung by boys and tenors. Alternate verses are sung to Sarum chant.

Trinity Boys Choir have an incredibly warm sound, and one is charmed by the beauty of their collective tone as much as by the individuality of the solo voices, ranging from the older, confident trebles to younger, fragile, naive voices. Listeners who enjoy the English choral tradition will certainly find this disc full of delightful singing. Beauty they have in abundance, but musical thrust and engagement is less evident. This performance tends towards ethereal wafting rather than purposeful phrasing. Ludford, I feel, demands much more of the latter and as such I prefer a brisker performance with more 'bite' to the sound such as can be found from Ensemble Scandicus. This is also the case with the medieval carols, *There is no rose of swych vertu* being tender but slightly pedestrian.

Having said that, the singing is more engaged and energetic in the newer works: Graham Lack's *Candlemas* – a wonderfully atmospheric meditation using voices, handbells and organ – and Leighton's setting of *The Lord is my shepherd*. Throughout the disc, the contribution of the handbell choir is a joyful and festive presence. I particularly enjoyed the contrast of the brilliant, bright bells with the smooth, ethereal boys' voices in the Communio 'Beata viscera'. The approach

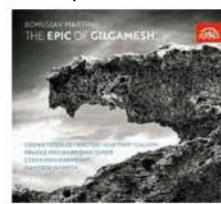
to polyphony here may be too gentle for my taste but it is wonderful to hear boys' voices singing with such beauty of tone.

Edward Breen

Ludford – selected comparison:
En Scandicus (3/14) (PIER) PV713111

Martinů

The Epic of Gilgamesh (sung in English)
Lucy Crowe sop Andrew Staples ten Derek Welton
bar Jan Martiník bass Simon Callow narr Prague
Philharmonic Choir; Czech Philharmonic
Orchestra / Manfred Honeck
Supraphon  SU4225-2 (51' • DDD • T/t)
Recorded live at the Rudolfinum, Prague, January 2017



Martinů initially described *The Epic of Gilgamesh* as 'a kind of profane secular cantata' but later asserted that it was 'neither an oratorio nor a cantata ... simply an epic'. Here we have it restored to the English in which it was written, and that raises the question: how do the inflections of English – rather than Czech – alter the gait of Martinů's music? The answer is, not as much as you might expect. Nor do passages spoken by a narrator stifle the flow, a problem Ivan Moody observed in the cantata *The Opening of the Wells* which, written in 1955, is contemporaneous with this piece.

Perhaps that's because we're dealing with something altogether broader in *Gilgamesh*. As the composer neared his end and clocked authoritarianism on the rise in both his adopted USA and native Czechoslovakia, he sought to affirm his ideas of love and friendship, apparently concerned by the soullessness of technology (how prescient). The source for his new work, first performed in Basel in 1958 (the year before his death), was a Babylonian text from over 2000 years before Christ in an idiosyncratic translation by Reginald Campbell Thompson. The overriding theme in the excerpt Martinů chose appears to be that of wisdom in the face of mortality.

Musically, the score is recognisably Martinů's, minus that overt *joie de vivre* but plus a sprinkling of the apocalyptic, hints of early polyphony and some borrowings from the *stile recitativo* that the composer took from studying Cavalieri's *Rappresentazione di anima e di corpo*. At the business end of the piece, the chorus's insistence that 'death is the day not yet revealed' sees Martinů stacking up cadences in his own inimitable way, railing against death emotionally and



TAM LAN TRUONG PHOTOGRAPHY

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technically. The score's relentless invention, much as in Wagner's *Ring*, comes largely from the resourcefulness and changeability of the orchestral conversation. That throws up plenteous colours.

But Martinů also wanted to conjure a mighty sound, and this live recording from the Rudolfinum suggests Manfred Honeck did just that in January 2017. We get all the score's churn and urgency, and tender luminosity too. The choir are well disciplined but not that bright and sometimes squish their English vowels, but the distinguished orchestra take to the work naturally. Of the soloists, Derek Welton makes most impact, perhaps because of the music he is given. Andrew Staples sings with affecting drama and Lucy Crowe is particularly delicious when draping drooping sighs over the wordless chorus. Simon Callow is a galvanising narrator, though it's a shame his fluffed opening stanza couldn't have been patched. Not that it really matters. We have an absorbing piece here in a generally fine performance caught with atmosphere. More than a document for Martinů bogs.

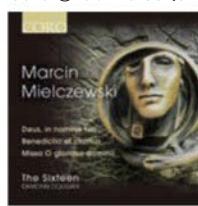
Andrew Mellor

Mielczewski

Benedictio et claritas. Canzona prima a 2. Canzona terza a 3. Deus, in nomine tuo. Gaude Dei genitrix. Iubilate Deo. Missa Cerviensiana - Kyrie; Gloria. Missa O gloriosa domina. Quem terra, pontus, aethera. Veni, Domine

The Sixteen / Eamonn Dougan

Coro Ⓜ COR16153 (61' • DDD • T/t)



The Sixteen's Polish series continues apace with this fine disc of music by the Italian-trained Marcin Mielczewski. The Italian connection has been a constant theme in the series, in fact – two volumes of the series are devoted to Italian composers working in Poland – and one wonders if an innocent ear would guess that this music was not written by an Italian. As Eamonn Dougan points out, the other constant is the influence of Palestrina: the classical contrapuntal skill in *Gaude Dei genitrix* is at the other end of the stylistic spectrum from the fully Baroque *concertato* settings of *Benedictio et claritas* or the rather Monteverdian *Veni, Domine*.

The *Missa Cerviensiana*, from which we hear the *Kyrie* and *Gloria*, scored for two choirs, one vocal and one instrumental, is built on an unidentified song; the model for the *Missa O gloriosa domina*, on the other hand, is a well-known Marian song, and

anyone hearing the lilting *Kyrie* or the 'Hosanna' section of the *Sanctus* would hardly be in any doubt of it. Both Mass settings are brief – the *Kyrie* of the latter lasts under a minute – but Mielczewski is very precise in his text setting, and when he wants to make a point, he does so: the beautiful descending scale motifs of the *Sanctus* are a good illustration of this.

Performances are of the standard one would expect from The Sixteen, the singers moving effortlessly between 'old' and 'new' styles, featuring some outstanding solo contributions in the *concertato* works and supported by an excellent ensemble of instrumentalists, to which the trombones make a particularly noteworthy contribution. **Ivan Moody**

Penderecki

'Penderecki Conducts Penderecki, Vol 2'
St Luke Passion (excs). Veni Creator. Psalm 30. Cherubic Hymn. Dies illa. O gloriosa virginum. We also shepherds. The Speckled Duck. Missa brevis. Magnificat - Sicut locutus est. Kaddish - We beseech you never to give us away. Polish Requiem - Agnus Dei. Benedictum Dominum. Symphony No 7, 'Seven Gates of Jerusalem' - De profundis. A sea of dreams did breathe on me - Potocka's Grave. Three Pieces in Olden Style - Aria

Warsaw Boys' Choir; Warsaw Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra / Krzysztof Penderecki
Warner Classics Ⓜ 9029 58195-5 (94' • DDD)



This two-disc set is an anthology of Penderecki's very substantial output of choral music, in superb performances under the composer's direction. The first four tracks of the first disc are the four separable choral sections from the *St Luke Passion* of 1965, and as such are likely to be among the best-known music here. They retain their dark, visceral power, and the blazing clarity of the final major chord at the end of 'Stabat mater' still has the power to shock. There is even earlier music here too, in the form of the setting of Psalm 30, from 1958, which establishes this style.

The setting of *Veni Creator* from 1987 builds on these foundations but with a new luminosity. It has always seemed to me one of the composer's best choral works, something I have never been able to say of his *Cherubic Hymn*, audible though the echoes of Orthodox chant are and fine though this performance is. 'Quid sum miser' and 'Recordare, dies illa' are both excerpts from *Dies illa* (2014), written to commemorate the victims of the First

World War, and effect an oblique re-engagement with tonality, and even modality, with their reminiscences of various repertoires from earlier centuries (and, thereby, the tradition of choral-symphonic Requiems). This historically informed lyricism is even more audible in *O gloriosa virginum* from 2009, and the two Christmas songs that end the disc are direct reflections of the traditional Polish carol repertoire.

The second disc begins with the *Missa brevis*, a work assembled over several years and published in its final version in 2012, including the 'Benedicamus Domino' from 1992 – this is the oldest music included in the work, and certainly the most interesting, though there are many fine moments during the piece. The rest of the disc is another anthology, beginning with a shining performance of the hugely impressive 'Sicut locutus est' extracted from the *Magnificat* of 1974 and followed by the no less remarkable 'We beseech you never to give us away' from *Kaddish* (2009). Two other large-scale choral works are excerpted – the *Polish Requiem* (1981), represented by the well-known 'Agnus Dei', and *Seven Gates of Jerusalem* from 15 years later, represented by 'De profundis', but I find the slow build-up of the independent *Benedictum Dominum* (1993) more impressive. To end, a piece in Polish, *A sea of dreams did breathe on me*, written in 2010 for the bicentenary of Chopin's birth, and the curious 'Aria', a textless adaptation of one of the *Three Pieces in Olden Style* from 1963.

All in all, an essential collection for any enthusiast of Penderecki's choral work, caught in exceptional performances under the composer's authoritative baton, and recorded with exemplary clarity by Warner's team at the Warsaw Philharmonic Concert Hall. **Ivan Moody**

Poldowski

'Poldowski Reimagined'
22 Mélodies sur les poèmes de Paul Verlaine (arr David Jackson)
Ensemble 1904 / David Jackson pf
Resonus Ⓜ RES10196 (54' • DDD • T/t)



The debut album of Ensemble 1904, founded by the pianist David Jackson to explore the lesser-known 20th-century French and British chamber repertoire, examines the work of the elusive figure nowadays usually called Régine Wieniawska, though we sometimes

encounter her under other names. A pupil of d'Indy, she was born in Brussels in 1879, the youngest daughter of the violinist Henryk Wieniawski. From 1896 she lived in London, where she published a handful of works as Irène Wieniawska. In 1901, she married a British aristocrat and became Lady Dean Paul. Poldowski was the professional pseudonym she subsequently adopted, by which she was primarily known until her death in 1932.

Despite the championship of Henry Wood, much of her work remained unpublished during her lifetime, and has yet to be rediscovered. Her songs, however, are edging their way back into the repertory, and 'Poldowski Reimagined' gathers together for the first time her complete settings of Verlaine, her favourite poet. There is, however, a catch. Jackson has rearranged the accompaniments for the unusual combination of piano, violin and double bass, his argument for doing so being that Wieniawska herself frequently prepared chamber versions of her songs, the scores for many of which are now lost. Given, however, that some of these songs have not been previously recorded, what we have is a 'reimagining' of material that is neither readily available nor familiar.

There is, it must be said, plenty to enjoy. The influence of Duparc, Fauré and Debussy is more than once apparent, but Wieniawska has a real feel for Verlaine's verse and frequently delves deep into its meaning. Her versions of poems from *Fêtes galantes* have an edgy, grotesque, even nightmarish quality, in contrast to the playful approach of many of her contemporaries. 'Impression fausse', using one of the prison poems from *Parallèlelement*, is a real find, wonderful in its depiction of the scampering mice and tolling bells that rob the inmates of sleep. The performances are good, too. Jazmin Black-Grollemund sings with great warmth of tone and careful attention to text. Jackson's playing is admirably clear and limpid. The double bassist, Jérémie Decottignies, has little to do beyond contributing pizzicato bass lines, though the violinist, Angélique Charlopain, is stylish and elegant throughout. Even so, the arrangements seem extraneous, and until we have the piano versions complete, Wieniawska is perhaps better served by Carolyn Sampson and Joseph Middleton's 'Verlaine Songbook' (BIS, 12/16), which gives us five of the original songs, exquisitely done. **Tim Ashley**

Schubert

'Songs, Vol 3'

An die Freunde, D654. An die Laute, D905. An mein Klavier, D342. Bei dir allein!, D866 No 2.

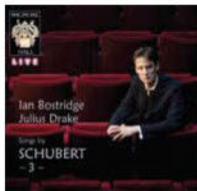
Der Einsame, D800. Freiwilliges Versinken, D700. Das Heimweh, D456. Hippolits Lied, D890. Im Abendrot, D799. Im Freien, D880. Der Jüngling an der Quelle, D300. Klage an den Mond, D436. Lied des gefangenen Jägers, D843. Das Lied im Grünen, D917. Normans Gesang, D846. Die Perle, D466. Schlaflied, D527. Sehnsucht, D879. Der Wanderer, D493. Der Wanderer an den Mond, D870. Wie Ulfru fischt, D525. Das Zügenglöcklein, D871. Der zürnenden Diana, D707

Ian Bostridge ten Julius Drake pf

Wigmore Hall Live (M) WHLIVE0088

(80' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live, September 15, 2014



The third volume of Ian Bostridge's leisurely Schubert series for Wigmore Hall Live is devoted to songs dealing with longing – urgent, resigned, realistic or unrequited. As previously in the series, the tenor puts together a stimulating mixture of the familiar and unfamiliar, and is supported with unerring sensitivity and skill at the piano by Julius Drake. The recording – live, of course – is excellent.

At no stage, either, does one doubt Bostridge's intellectual or emotional commitment; he is alive to the text as few other singers are today. The voice, now more than two decades since he burst onto the scene with his first fresh-faced *Schöne Müllerin*, has inevitably lost some of its honey but there's an undeniable honesty in its reedier, more tensile timbre.

However, while the programme offers a variety of moods within its own poetic parameters, the tenor's own emotional palette can feel limited, calling on familiar habits which, according to taste, one could define as either expressive strategies or musical tics. Unsophisticated, unmediated ardour doesn't come easily, and 'Bei dir allein', for example, turns into an unusually angsty affair. And compare, for example, Bostridge's account of 'Der Wanderer an den Mond' with the disarming straightforwardness of Benjamin Appl's recent account, also on WHL, with Graham Johnson (7/16).

Often one wishes the tenor would take his foot off the interpretative throttle, relax and let the words speak for themselves. There are other times, though, where one welcomes his intensity, such as in an imposing account of 'Normans Gesang'; and his extra pointing of the words certainly keeps you on your toes as a listener – listen to the strikingly varied 'Der Einsame' or a wide-eyed, vulnerable 'Im Abendrot'.

It doesn't all work for me, admittedly, but there's no doubt that Bostridge and Drake offer Schubert that never rests, never ceases in its *Wanderer*-like quest for new interpretative possibilities. **Hugo Shirley**

Schubert

Die schöne Müllerin, D795

Christian Gerhaher bar Gerold Huber pf

Sony Classical (F) 88985 42740-2 (74' • DDD • T/t)



While Christian Gerhaher's 2003 recording of Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin* doesn't have English translations of the poem texts (RCA, 2/04), the new remake wouldn't be without them – and then some – with its unusual concentration on how the Wilhelm Müller poems are part of the package. In his excellent booklet essay 'To whom does the Fair Maid of the Mill belong?' Gerhaher points out that the composer creates only the last of many layers, not just in an individual Lied but in a cycle that has such a strong narrative. In fact, the booklet is one reason to go for the physical disc rather than a download, and is an essential guide to knowing what he's after in this performance.

Though Gerhaher wraps his voice around Schubert's heartier vocal lines more comfortably than in his 2003 recording (though lacking the suaveness of Florian Boesch – Onyx, 4/14), the unaided ear could assume that that Gerhaher wasn't in his best voice for this recording with his longtime collaborator Gerold Huber. On closer listen, he is living in the world of the poems selflessly. Only flashes of the virile baritone sound are heard. As Gerhaher points out in his notes, the cycle's protagonist, sometimes called 'the Miller', is actually an apprentice. In contrast to the deeper, even bored-sounding tone of the Miller who is his boss, the apprentice has a pale, low-vibrato sound whose most private voice, heard in 'Morgengruss' and 'Tränenregen', conveys the character's chronic uncertainty, shyness and perhaps self-manufactured heartbreak. In more emotionally animated moments of 'Der Jäger' and 'Eifersucht und Stolz', Gerhaher could easily have gone Wagnerian but instead delivers a somewhat strident, nasal sound that fits this unheroic figure. Clearly, an interpretation this personal could only work in a recording studio, if only because such subtlety wouldn't project in the concert hall.

Gerhaher also elects to recite the sections of Müller that Schubert dropped,



Jane Birkin is among the stars assembled by Alexandre Tharaud for his tribute to the French singer-songwriter Barbara - see review on page 104

including a prelude and epilogue plus a few poems within the cycle itself, the recitations giving the ear a brief intermission in what is a fairly long haul of 20 songs. The conclusion is that both composer and poet were right. Müller successfully rounded out his story; Schubert smartly streamlined it. And if this is the process through which Gerhaher arrived at his singular inside-out view of *Die schöne Müllerin*, I must respect it. Gerhaher is often so inside the character that each phrase feels loaded with meaning without sounding overloaded in the manner of late-period Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau or self-conscious in the linguistically meticulous manner of Ian Bostridge. The biggest dividend to Gerhaher's approach is any number of moments where you feel part of the protagonist's thought process, as he hatches ideas on the spot. How often does that happen? **David Patrick Stearns**

Schubert

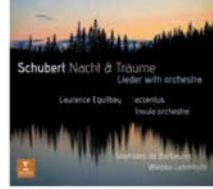
'Nacht und Träume'

An Silvia, D891 (orch anon)^a. Coronach, D836 (orch Krawczyk)^c. Du bist die Ruh, D776 (orch Webern)^b. Erlkönig, D328 (orch Berlioz)^b. Die Forelle, D550 (orch Britten)^b. Ganymed, D544 (orch R Strauss)^b. Der Gondelfahrer, D809 (orch Krawczyk)^c. Das Grab, D377 (orch Krawczyk)^c. Gruppe aus dem Tartarus,

D583 (orch Brahms)^a. Im Abendrot, D799 (orch Reger)^b. Die junge Nonne, D828 (orch Liszt)^a. Nacht und Träume, D827 (orch Krawczyk)^b. Rosamunde, D979 - Entr'acte No 3; Romanze^a. Ständchen, D957 No 4 (orch Mottl)^b

^aWiebke Lehmkühl *mez*
^bStanislas de Barbeyrac *ten* ^cAccentus;
 Insula Orchestra / Laurence Equilbey

Erato **F** 9029 57694-3 (50' • DDD • T/t)



A lot of thought has gone into this lovely album of orchestrated

Schubert songs, as conductor Laurence Equilbey makes clear in a booklet note – as well as in an interview in these pages last month. It features, first of all, a period-instrument orchestra, who have opted for a kind of chronological middle ground between the dates of composition and orchestration: their instruments (original or copies) are drawn from around the second half of the 19th century.

The results are beguiling, especially since the conductor has plumped for arrangements that capture a gentler, more limpid sound world than we get in the more robust, Germanic versions by the likes of Max Reger. Indeed, several songs

(including a couple of part-songs, limpidly sung by Accentus) appear in skilful new orchestrations by Franck Krawczyk. Where you can pick out the rocking semiquavers in Reger's 'Nacht und Träume', Krawczyk's – performed relatively swiftly here – offers a mossy pillow of sound.

Liszt's 'Die junge Nonne', Brahms's 'Gruppe aus dem Tartarus' and Berlioz's 'Erlkönig' are made of stern stuff, and Equilbey doesn't stint on the drama in the latter, in particular. The new arrangements otherwise fit in well with the gentle orchestrations we have elsewhere on the programme: Webern's lovely 'Du bist die Ruh'; Britten's 'Die Forelle', with its bubbling clarinet; Strauss's 'Ganymed'; or, in particular, Felix Mottl's tender 'Ständchen'.

That last song opens the disc and immediately one is struck by the high quality of Stanislas de Barbeyrac's singing. His interpretations are sensitive and intelligent and his tenor is beautifully controlled – flexible but steely, plangent with bracing hints of the heroic, filling out excitingly in the big phrases of 'Nacht und Träume'. Wiebke Lehmkühl is hardly less fine, her mezzo wonderfully limpid and rich.

You get more in the way of hands-on interpretation from, say, Anne Sofie von Otter in her performances of some of the same songs – though not all in the same

orchestrations – with Abbado and the Chamber Orchestra of Europe. Both of these singers, however, fit in perfectly with Equilbey's more gentle, thoughtful approach.

Fifty minutes is arguably a bit on the stingy side but the recorded sound is mellow and detailed, giving an excellent sense of both the voices and the vivid playing of the Insula Orchestra. Very warmly recommended. **Hugo Shirley**

Lieder – selected comparison:

Von Otter, COE, Abbado

(7/03) (DG) 471 586-2GH or 479 1119GHO

Barbara'

Pierre^a. Cet enfant-là^b. Septembre^c. Mes hommes^d. Du bout des lèvres^e. Vivant poème^f. A mourir pour mourir^g. Yaura du monde^h. Là-basⁱ. C'est trop tard^j. Au Bois de Saint-Amand^k. Vienne^l. Dis, quand reviendras-tu (Say, when will you return?)^m. Les amis de monsieurⁿ. Attendez que ma joie revienne^o. Ô mes théâtres^p. Valse de Franz. Nantes^q. Ce matin-là. Le bel âge^s. Plus rien. Rémusat^t. J'ai tué l'amour. Ma plus belle histoire d'amour^u

Alexandre Tharaud pf with ^aTim Dup, ^bDominique A, ^cCamélia Jordana, ^dJuliette, ^eVanessa Paradis, ^fJean-Louis Aubert, ^gRadio Elvis, ^hBénabar, ⁱJane Birkin, ^jAlbin de la Simone, ^kRokia Traoré, ^lJuliette Binoche, ^mHindi Zahra, ⁿGuillaume Gallienne, ^oLuz Casal *voc* ^pharp Michel Portal *cl* ^lRenaud Capuçon, ⁱHervé Joulain *vn* ^{ah}Louis Rodde, ^mFrançois Salque *vc* ^{dh}Stéphane Logerot *db* ^aOlivier Marguerit *kybds* ^oFrançois Lasserre *gtr* ^{adqt} ^lRoland Romanelli *accordion* ^{bor}Modigliani Quartet

Erato ⑧ 9029 57591-5 (78' • DDD)



The great French singer-songwriter Barbara died 20 years ago this November at the age of 67. Alexandre Tharaud, then in his late twenties, was among the many who gathered, three days later, for her funeral, and in a booklet essay recalls how, once the TV cameras were switched off, the crowd at her graveside spontaneously sang her best-known songs one by one. 'We kept singing', he writes, 'as if we wanted it to go on forever.' The idea of recording a tribute, he adds, came to him at that moment, and now, to mark the anniversary of her death, we have this beautiful set, which forms his often very personal response to her work.

As usual, Tharaud confounds expectations and the two discs here, each of which is actually a self-contained album, approach Barbara's music in very different ways. With collaborators drawn from classical and popular music, film and

theatre, the first presents a sequence of covers which offer shifting perspectives on Barbara's songs. The arrangements are Tharaud's own, and the disc begins and ends with 'Pierre', transformed into a piano prelude that glances in the direction of Bach and the introduction to Hahn's 'À Chloris'. The song itself, addressed to a (probably) imaginary lover, becomes gloriously homoerotic when sung by Tim Dup at the disc's midpoint, one of many wonderfully effective numbers here.

Juliette gets down and dirty with 'Mes hommes'. Jane Birkin's 'Là-bas' is vulnerable and exquisite, her voice hovering above shivery, minimalist tintinnabulations. Juliette Binoche, meanwhile, intones 'Vienne' over a passionate-sounding violin solo from Renaud Capuçon, and 'Dis, quand reviendras-tu?' gets its first recording in English as 'Say, when will you return?' – a deeply felt performance by Hindi Zahra, and a quiet reminder, perhaps, that, with notable exceptions (Martha Wainwright, Marc Almond), too few singers have tackled Barbara's songs away from the French-speaking world.

The second disc, entitled 'Echo', takes us into different territory. 'Her words without music and her music without words' is how Tharaud describes it. The opening track finds Binoche reciting the text of 'Ô mes théâtres', with the kind of contained intensity one associates with a Comédie-Française actress. What follows, however, is a series of instrumental meditations that deconstruct and reconstruct Barbara's songs in ways that link back to the Bach-like version of 'Pierre' heard on disc 1. 'Ce matin-là' is transformed into an intimate work for clarinet and piano quintet that has the poise and melancholy grace of Fauré. 'Rémusat' is an accordion solo that picks at the melody over the sparsest of accompaniments, while 'Valse de Franz' becomes a delirious concert waltz that veers towards Ravel and Rachmaninov in turn. If the first disc could broadly be described as 'crossover', the second deliberately blurs the boundaries between classical and popular music, and the results are fascinating. You will either like it or you won't. I loved both discs, though – but, like Tharaud, I also love Barbara's songs.

Tim Ashley

'Gold'

Disc 1, 'Close Harmony' – works by Arlen, Chilcott, Clare, Frances, Gershwin, Joel, Khalifa, Kidjo, Legend, Lennon/McCartney, P Simon, J Taylor, Traditional, Tunstall and U2
Disc 2, 'Spiritual' – works by RR Bennett, Byrd, Chilcott, Hebreo, Hession, Lassus, Ley, Lobo,

Palestrina, Poole, Poulenc, Reger, Rheinberger, Stanford, Schütz, Tallis, Whitacre and Vaughan Williams
Disc 3, 'Secular' – works by Ancheta, Auric, Brahms, Byrd, Fauré, Lassus, Le Jeune, E Johnson, Josquin Desprez, J-P-É Martini, Rutter, Saint-Saëns, Schubert, Senfl, Takemitsu, Traditional, Van Dijk and Vásquez
The King's Singers

Signum ⑧ SIGCD500 (3h 14' • DDD • T/t)



In 1967 six choral scholars from Cambridge founded a singing group and accidentally started a phenomenon. Photos of the original King's Singers line-up show an earnest, bespectacled troupe of young men whose uneasy formality is a million miles away from today's slick, matching-suited young members. But musically far less has changed, as 'Gold' – the group's 50th anniversary triple-album – makes very clear.

Because what hits you first and leaves you last when listening to this project is the astonishing, exhilarating musicianship of these singers. You may or may not enjoy the group's signature sound, with its diffuse bass warmth and blowsy top line (which has miraculously survived the departure of longstanding countertenor David Hurley), but there's no arguing with tuning that electrifies even the simplest of chords, or with a vocal blend that turns cluster chords into gauzy clouds of colour. Stripped of the showmanship that's so central to their live performances, this new generation of King's Singers here prove that they still have the skills to go back to basics.

Paying tribute to the group's past, while also bringing things cannily up to date, the three wide-ranging discs (five centuries of music spans from pristine Henry Ley to smoochy John Legend) divide their repertoire into three categories: 'Close Harmony', 'Sacred' and 'Secular'. It's a decision that allows them to roam to their musical extremes without the difficulty of trying to tie it all together in a single, coherent programme.

While all the recordings here are new, the pleasure for many longtime listeners will be hearing fresh accounts of familiar works and arrangements. Stanford's *The Blue Bird* (erroneously titled here, along with Mary Coleridge's original poem, as 'The Bluebird') flies freer than ever in this graceful performance, Rheinberger's swooning *Abendlied* swells with so much restrained emotion that you scarcely miss larger choral forces, while Poulenc's *Quatre*

Petites prières de Saint François d'Assise feel markedly more differentiated and characterised than on their previous 'Pater noster' (Naxos, 12/12).

There's novelty, too, in a mixed bag of new arrangements and commissions. Neither Bob Chilcott's *We are* nor Toby Hession's *Master of Music* make much of a mark, but John Rutter's new *Tempest*-setting *Be not afeard* (its musical waves lulling and lapping evocatively) and arrangements of *Shenandoah* (Chilcott) and KT Tunstall's *Black horse and the cherry tree* (L'Estrange) all feel like lasting additions to the group's superb catalogue – a musical legacy well worth celebrating in its own right.

Looking back over 50 years of performances and recordings by The King's Singers, it's hard to think of a group whose music-making has aged so well. The joy, the generosity and the eclecticism of their earliest recordings are all still the defining qualities in their latest. The spectacles and stiff stances may be long gone but other things just never go out of fashion. Here's to 50 more years.

Alexandra Coglan

'In dulci jubilo'

J Christoph Bach *Merk auf, mein Herz*

Buxtehude Fürchtet euch nicht, BuxWV30. In dulci jubilo, BuxWV52. Jesu dulcis memoria, BuxWV57. Das neugebor'ne Kindlein, BuxWV13. Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland, BuxWV211. Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern, BwxWV223. **Geist** Pastores dicte quidnam vidistis. Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern **Reincken** Fuga in G minor **Scheidemann** Praeambula – WV35; WV39. **Sweelinck** Ab Oriente venerunt Magi, SwWV153. **Tunder** Ein kleines Kindlein **Weckmann** Rex virtutum **Theatre of Voices / Paul Hillier**

Dacapo (F) 6 220661 (78' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



This latest exploration of Buxtehude and his circle from Paul Hillier and the Theatre of Voices is a joyful, festive programme divided into four sections – 'The Annunciation and Advent', 'The Shepherds', 'The Nativity' and 'New Year, Epiphany & Annunciation' – each one containing a work by Buxtehude, at least one substantial motet by a related composer and an organ solo. It was recorded in the warm acoustic of Garnisonskirken, Copenhagen.

There is an incredible variety here, as demonstrated by the first three tracks: beginning with a delicate, bright organ *Praeambulum* in F by Heinrich

Scheidemann (c1595-1663) played by Allen Rasmussen on a mellow and intimate chamber organ by Verner Pedersen. Then comes a setting of the hymn 'Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern' by Christian Geist (c1650-1711) for solo soprano with intertwining violin parts, played with a delicious sprightly quality by Fredrik From and Jesenka Balic Zunic. Lastly, a small masterpiece by Johann Christoph Bach (1642-1703), *Merk auf, mein Herz* for double choir. Listeners will know this from an intimate, meditative performance by Vox Luminis under Lionel Meunier (Ricercar, 8/15). Here, however, Hillier offers a faster, more demonstrative and quick-witted reading. Listen out for the ox and ass, and the stunning setting of 'zu ruhn in meines Herzens Schrein, dass nimmer ich vergesse dein'. The execution of that last line ('that I may never forget you') shows Hillier's Midas touch.

Generally speaking, this vocal line-up is not my favourite of the permutations of this ensemble. The musicianship is, as ever, extraordinary but the balance suffers. Particularly I find the first soprano dominates and the basses sometimes plod against the tide of the instrumental phrasing. The last motet, *Ab Oriente venerunt Magi* by Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562-1621), however, is Theatre of Voices at their level best: tender, blended and deliciously phrased. If you are looking for the Christmas disc of 2017, here it is. **Edward Breen**

'Lux in tenebris'

Feo La sinderesi **Gennaro Manna** Gloria Patri.

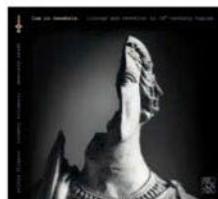
Lamentazione terza del Giovedi Santo

Gaetano Manna Lamentazione seconda del Giovedi Santo

Silvia Frigato sop

Talenti Vulcanici / Emanuele Cardi

Arcana (F) A437 (51' • DDD • T/t)



Two sets of Lamentations and a penitential cantata bring plenty of darkness to this disc of sacred works from 18th-century Naples. But, as the disc's title suggests, there's also light, thanks to the grace and elegance of works by composers Gennaro Manna, Francesco Feo and Gaetano Manna – musicians from a single family but three very distinct musical worlds.

The two Lamentation sequences for Maundy Thursday, both scored for solo soprano and strings, come from uncle Gennaro and nephew Gaetano Manna. The generational divide is clear, with the

elder Manna favouring Pergolesi-like sobriety and simplicity of line (conjuring a wonderfully brooding vision of 'those who dwell in darkness' in the string-writing of his 'In tenebris'), while the younger is a composer looking ahead to the more highly worked *galant* style, even to Mozart, in his lighter, brighter treatment of text.

Soprano Silvia Frigato's brilliant, slightly metallic soprano is a precision instrument, flourishing in the filigree writing of Gaetano's music, bringing lovely ornaments to the 'Matribus suis', where her sparkling upper register is given a chance to shine, and cherishing the lovely legatos of the composer's short settings of the Hebrew letters – Lamed, Nun, Samech – that punctuate the sequence. Less suited to the darker, lower writing of Gennaro, she really comes into her own in the more operatic writing of his uncle Francesco Feo's cantata *La sinderesi*, with its extravagant leaps and runs and dynamic *accompagnato* recitatives.

Talenti Vulcanici and conductor **Emanuele Cardi** offer crisp, undemonstrative accompaniment throughout, maintaining the spirit of the works' original liturgical setting in a recording that offers just a taste of the richness of repertoire this fertile period in Naples' musical history has to offer.

Alexandra Coglan

'Music for the Queen of Heaven'

'Contemporary Marian Motets'

L Berkeley Regina coeli, laetare **Campbell** Ave

Maria Dodgson Dormi, Jesu **Frances-Hoad**

GAUDE ET LAETARE **Howells** Salve regina

G Jackson Salve regina **McDowall** Alma

redemptoris mater **MacMillan** Ave maris stella

M Martin Ave virgo sanctissima **A Panufnik**

Song to the Virgin Mary **R Panufnik** St Pancras

Service - Magnificat **Weir** Ave regina caelorum

The Marian Consort / Rory McCleery

Delphian (F) DCD34190 (60' • DDD • T/t)



The Marian Consort made its debut recording for the Delphian label in 2011 with an acclaimed programme of 'Music of Marian Devotion from Spain's Century of Gold'. Now Rory McCleery directs them in a richly rewarding disc of 20th-century *a cappella* motets, once again celebrating the Virgin Mary, the Queen of Heaven. Spanning just over a century of music, a dozen British composers take fresh approaches to ancient Latin texts, mostly antiphons, with just one setting of the most celebrated Marian canticle of all – the

GRAMOPHONE Collector

LUTHERAN SONGS

Fabrice Fitch explores a handful of Reformation-themed discs



Rich pedigree: Alamire have recorded two versions of Tallis's large-scale motet *Gaude gloriosa Dei mater*

The Reformation quincentenary has been plentifully marked in the discography, several fine recordings having appeared in these pages in the past year. Unsurprisingly, the bulk of them come from German labels and ensembles.

Of the present batch, the closest to Luther himself, both on the CPO label, are perhaps the most instructive. On the recital from **Himlische Cantorey**, a few of the chorales most closely associated with Luther are immediately followed by polyphonic reworkings by two of the composers also so associated, Johann Walter and the memorably named Caspar Othmayr. This didactic approach works perfectly well, given the focus on these specific individuals. The performances are sympathetic and effective, with solo voices accompanied by organ and theorbo. No undue claims are made for the music but both composers are surely worthy of the attention; the performers' approach is similarly self-effacing. The only quibble is the recital's duration, which at just under 50 minutes is a little thin for repertoire that's out of copyright.

The more ambitious offering from the Bach-Chor Siegen and the **Johann-Rosenmüller Ensemble** is perhaps more enjoyable still. A short polyphonic motet attributed to Luther himself is the starting point, with Bach's Cantata No 4, *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, at the other end. Along the way there's considerable stylistic

variety, though always underpinned by the same chorales. Particularly good to hear are the contributions of Thomas Stoltzer and Johann Rosenmüller (of whose music there seem to be fewer new recordings than there once were); a rarer discovery is an extended setting of *Jauchzet ihr Himmel* by one Werner Fabricius (me neither). The performances are more extrovert than Himlische Cantorey and none the worse for it; the forces vary from piece to piece, though the decision to perform BWV4 with a chorus seems odd in this particular context.

Ensemble Per-Sonat (consisting here of two singers and a small consort of plucked and bowed strings) explore the substantial repertoire of early Lied from Luther's time and beyond, featuring Senfl, Lassus and his pupils Hassler and Lechner, and finishing with Schein. Given Luther's proficiency in music, this seems an entirely appropriate contribution to the quincentenary. Hassler's Italianate *Mein Gmuth ist mir verwirret* makes the point that the boundary between secular and sacred was frequently crossed in this period: today the piece is better known in its chorale adaptation, *O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden*. But given the porousness of that boundary, I can't help finding the performances a touch solemn and constrained, as though the musicians hadn't quite settled on the desired tone – a shame, for at their best these performances are genuinely affecting.

A different sort of cultural dissonance obtains in the **Telemann** recital from Concerto Melante. This consists of a selection of vocal works written in 1730 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession (another foundation-event of the Reformed movement) and incorporating, shall we say, the usual chorale suspects. Framing these are Johann Walter's polyphonic reworkings of the same tunes. The inclusion of the latter seems a touch forced, as though a nod to music of Luther's time were obligatory. Even as palate-cleansers I don't really sense the need for them, given that the selection of trio sonatas that interleaves the vocal pieces serve the purpose very well. Then again, it's instructive to hear Telemann's take on melodies as well known as these, and on the whole these are spirited performances, so if you think I'm being over-fastidious, don't let me stop you sampling them.

The odd one out in this group is Alamire's **Tallis** recital, the impetus for which is the recognition of a previously unidentified English text for Tallis's large-scale motet *Gaude gloriosa Dei mater* as being in the hand of no less a person than Henry VIII's last queen, Katherine Parr. The two versions top and tail the recital (they're subtly different), complemented by Fretwork in instrumental versions of other Tallis motets, and a five-voice Litany newly identified as being by Tallis himself. Alamire's pedigree in music of this period requires little advocacy but much of this music has been heard before, and I confess that I'd not choose to hear the Litany again unless as part of a live liturgical reconstruction. Might not a single, EP-length issue have served equally well? **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Music of the Reformation

Himlische Cantorey
CPO (F) CPO777 275-2



Davon ich singen und sagen will

Johann Rosenmüller Ens / Stötzel
CPO (F) CPO555 098-2



Bis an der Welt ihr Ende

Ens Per-Sonat / Lutzenberger
Christophorus (F) CHR77410



Telemann Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott

Conc Melante
DHM (F) 88985 34798-2



Tallis Songs of Reformation

Alamire; Fretwork / Skinner
Obsidian (F) CD716

Magnificat – by Roxanna Panufnik. Her father Andrzej's *Song to the Virgin Mary* is the disc's centrepiece (and longest track). Structured as a musical palindrome, this setting of one of Poland's oldest hymns also visits each of the 12 keys before grinding to an ecstatic halt.

Two composers tackle the same text – the *Salve regina*. Gabriel Jackson takes a soothing, close-harmony approach, whereas the Howells (which dates from 1915 and was written for Richard Terry's fledgling Westminster Cathedral Choir) is clearly the product of many hours improvising in the organ loft. Anna Dennis's soaring solo is deliciously outstanding. Howells's spirit also hovers benevolently over Hilary Campbell's scrunchy *Ave Maria* of 2012. By way of contrast, mock medievalisms are a distinctive feature of Cecilia McDowall's votive antiphon *Alma redemptoris mater*.

The most recent track, dating from 2016, is Cheryl Frances-Hoad's *Gaude et laetare*. Here the bells ring out in a tour de force of rousing harmonic daring. Joy also spills out of Lennox Berkeley's *Regina coeli, laetare*, the third of his Op 83 motets. The hypnotic repeated notes of MacMillan's Vesper hymn *Ave maris stella* bring this perfectly balanced sequence to a serene conclusion.

With no more than eight voices singing, the recorded balance is generally excellent with just a couple of moments when the bass's lowest notes fail to register completely. **Malcolm Riley**

‘Parle qui veut’

‘Moralizing Songs of the Middle Ages’

Andrea da Firenze Dal traditor **Anonymous**

Hont paur. O pensieri vani. Parle qui veut. Pour che que je ne puis. Va, Fortune **Antonio ‘Zacara’ da Teramo** Cacciando per gustar/Ai cinci, ai toppi **Ciconia** Ligiadra donna **Giovanni da Firenze** Angnel son biancho **Landini** Musicha son/Già furon/Ciascun vuol **Niccolò da Perugia** Il megli’ è pur tacere **Paolo da Firenze** Perché vendecta **Solage** La basile

Sollazzo Ensemble

Linn **®** CKD529 (46' • DDD • T/t)



This has to be one of the most exciting and engaging releases of medieval song in recent years. The Sollazzo Ensemble offer a programme of French and Italian works drawing chiefly on Trecento composers from around Florence and their French counterparts. The moralising theme allows for a great deal of variety from both known and anonymous composers to form a

coherent and varied programme. This album forms part of the ensemble's prize as winners of the 2015 York Early Music Artists Competition and is recorded with a warm clarity by Linn Records in the National Centre for Early Music.

The Sollazzo Ensemble are formed of three voices, two vielles and a harp. Their sound is generally bright, deft and energetic with a very clear focus on text. The singers use a variety of techniques to engage and communicate, from beautiful clear phrasing to crisp, expressive consonants, which at times allows them to tread a deliciously thin line between soft singing and electrifying stage whispers. Every performance on this disc is illuminating, considered and committed. Take for instance the madrigal by Giovanni da Firenze (fl 1340-50): *Angnel son biancho* from the Panciatichi Codex, a moralising tale told from the point of view of a sacrificial lamb. The bright, shimmering sopranos Yukie Sato and Perrine Devillers sing in delicate unison as the voice of this lamb, relishing the onomatopoeic bleating in the text until the actual sacrifice is mentioned, leaving just one soprano to finish the madrigal with poignant stillness.

More than once, this album has confronted me with old favourites performed in new ways. Solage's (fl late 14th century) harmonically slithery, menacing ballade *Le basile* I had much admired in the rich, smooth vocalised performance by Gothic Voices on their then groundbreaking album ‘The Study of Love’ (Hyperion, 6/93), but here, Vivien Simon's gloriously clear tenor voice is absolutely bewitching. **Edward Breen**

‘Secrets’

Debussy Trois Chansons de Bilitis. Trois

Mélodies de Verlaine **Duparc** Quatre Mélodies

Fauré Mirages **Ravel** Shéhérazade^a. Vocalise en forme de habanera **Say** Gezi Park 3

Marianne Crebassa *mez* **Fazil Say** *pf*

^a**Bernhard Krabatsch** *fl*

Erato **®** 9029 57689-7 (69' • DDD • T/t)



Marianne Crebassa's French song album surveys the *fin de siècle* mélodie from Duparc to late Fauré, placing the emphasis on settings of Symbolist poetry and the power of music either to unlock or to encapsulate its ‘secrets’ (whence the title). With her warm tone and often remarkable way with both vocal colour and verbal inflection, Crebassa is outstanding in this repertory, and

in Fazil Say she has an accompanist whose direct yet subtle approach matches her own.

Trois Chansons de Bilitis, with which they open, gets one of its sexiest performances on disc, with Crebassa wonderful in her judgement of the thin dividing line between sensuality and naivety. The outer songs of the *Trois Mélodies de Verlaine* have an exuberant sweep, though time seems to stand still in the central ‘Le son du cor s’afflige vers les bois’, with its suggestion of distant sounds echoing across a desiccated landscape. One false move in Fauré's *Mirages*, meanwhile, and the cycle can seem overwrought, though the performance here is a model of restraint: Crebassa gently teases out the nuances in Renée de Brimont's rather self-conscious text; Say does extraordinary things with the ceaselessly shifting accompaniments.

There are a couple of surprises along the way, however. First of all, *Shéhérazade* comes with piano – not for the first time on disc, though in this instance a solo flute is added for the second song. Crebassa projects text and line with just the right combination of elegance and insinuation, but the piano-writing, particularly in ‘Asie’, sounds altogether more menacing and aggressive than the more familiar orchestral version – a reminder, perhaps, that Ravel's Orient is as dangerous as it is attractive.

Second, the final track is Say's own *Gezi Park 3*, of which Crebassa is the dedicatee, the last in a trilogy of works composed in response to the brutal suppression of protests against the proposed urbanisation of Istanbul's Taksim Gezi Park by the authorities in 2013. An unsparing wordless lament, it draws on traditional Turkish music and takes Crebassa almost to her limits with leaps between soaring high lyricism and guttural phrases low in her voice. Say's piano-writing, initially Debussian, turns jagged and increasingly angry at the climax.

Some might question its inclusion; but we are to some extent prepared for its emotional landscape by the unusual Duparc group that immediately precedes it – four bleak songs about absence and loss, during which the mood perceptibly darkens. Crebassa brings operatic weight to ‘Élégie’ with its echoes of *Tristan*, and the Gothic frissons of ‘Au pays où se fait la guerre’ add to the prevailing sense of anguish. Here, as throughout, the combination of intelligence, immediacy and subtlety is utterly compelling and marks ‘Secrets’ out as one of the finest French song recitals of recent years. I cannot recommend it too highly.

Tim Ashley

REISSUES

Bryce Morrison celebrates an eloquent piano virtuoso, commemorated in a 10-CD box-set by Documents

The art of Moura Lympney

A valuable reminder of a great British pianist, a star in her own day

With this 10-CD set of recordings, dating from 1951 to 1961, entitled 'Milestones of a Legend', Documents trumps all previous aces, including reissues by Decca, Testament, Dutton and APR's 'The Lympney Legend'. Too often viewed as a lightweight (encouraged by those with a malicious eye on her social-climbing proclivities – 'How Moura loves royalty' quipped Shura Cherkassky), her eloquence, clarity and simplicity allowed her to achieve, without fuss or exaggeration, a distinctive sense of musical truth and ambience. Time and again she tells us that there are higher gods than an excessive concern with intellectual rigour or pressured, high-octane virtuosity. A great admirer of Alfred Cortot, whose 'careless rapture' was the reverse of her own distinctive musical quality, Lympney showed a generosity of spirit uncommon among pianists (for her friend and colleague Cécile Ousset, Cortot belonged 'to the age of the wrong note'), an awareness of the necessity for difference and variety. Her fluency was delightful because seemingly effortless, her technique commanding but unobtrusive. True, she could skim the music's surface with the speed and agility of a water boatman but she had strength aplenty for such ultra-demanding fare as Brahms's Second and Rachmaninov's Third Concertos, for Brahms's *Paganini* Variations and Balakirev's *Islamey*. Again, if Lympney left a less indelible imprint than other great women pianists (Hess, Haskil, Annie Fisher et al) that could be seen more as a virtue than a limitation.

So let me start with what are surely Lympney's finest recordings. That these have acquired legendary status in the catalogue says much for her continued standing, a constant reminder of her quality. Firstly, there is Mendelssohn's G minor Concerto (a life-long favourite since her debut concert in Harrogate at

the age of 12). A more delectably light-fingered performance is hard to imagine. Even with competition from the likes of Sir András Schiff and Murray Perahia, her ease and transparency lend this gem of a concerto an irresistible sheen. Once again, no need for extraneous gestures ('I never went in for chi-chi phrasing or powdered rubato') and whether in the *Andante*'s enchanting Victorian poetry (in such skilled and sensitive hands, 'music to soothe the savage breast') or the finale's mad-cap scintillation, nothing obtrudes between composer and pianist, between creator and re-creator. The *Rondo Brillante* (a hilarious piece of high camp), too, is spun off with all of Lympney's verve

Her fluency was delightful because seemingly effortless, her technique commanding but unobtrusive

and brio, erasing in its life and sparkle a dismissive reference to 'a relentless trifle'. Saint-Saëns Second Concerto, journeying 'from Bach to Offenbach', is another example of Lympney's classic virtues, as 'light as a harebell' (to lift some words from James Huneker) in the Scherzo, propulsive and dazzling in the tarantella finale. Such playing would surely have brought Ilona Kabos (Lympney's coach) up short and made her revise her question, 'Where is this Lympney technique I hear so much about?'

Chopin was always central to Lympney's large, and principally Romantic, repertoire and the first of her two recordings of the 24 Preludes soars high among the very finest. Naturally and unselfconsciously she extracts the last ounce of poetry in this opus of extreme mood-swings. She makes a stronger case than others (with the exception of Sergio Fiorentino) of obeying Chopin's *lento* in No 2, capturing

much of its exceptional morbidity. Her controlled virtuosity in No 16 provides a valid contrast to Martha Argerich's manic blaze of temperament, while her poise in No 19 captures precisely that flight into – for Chopin – a cloudless azure.

The complete sets of the Nocturnes and Waltzes are, arguably, more variable, though Lympney's subtle lines and phrases are instantly recognisable. Less alluring than Rubinstein in the early B major Nocturne, she takes Chopin's *allegretto (scherzando)* too much at face value. But in such poetic numbers as No 5 (singled out by Huneker as 'inseparable from champagne and truffles') she is never over-expressive while giving everything its poetic due. Again, you will hear a cooler, more distant response than Horowitz's neurotic intensity in the Op 27 C sharp minor Nocturne and in the following D flat Nocturne her response to Chopin's love of *bel canto* can seem evasive, particularly when compared with Rubinstein and Lipatti. Yet she captures all of the underlying drama of the outwardly Field-like Nocturne in B, Op 22, to the coda's sinister timpani strokes and anguished recitatives and she eases her way with consummate skill from the A flat Nocturne's opening calm into the central agitation. In the two G minor Nocturnes, where you hear the monks of Valdemosha, she inflects their chant with the utmost gravity, and even when you remain bewitched by Cherkassky's beguiling idiosyncrasy in the F sharp Nocturne, his occasional archness plays no part in Lympney's musical make-up, her grace and restraint haunting you in a different way. In the E flat Nocturne, Op 55 with its prophecy of Fauréan radiance and ambiguity, Lympney's ease is, again, far remote from, say, Ivo Pogorelich's near Wagnerian inflation, his distortion of the music's natural perspective.

Lympney's success in the Waltzes – Chopin's more public face – is more

intermittent, though at its best it is often magical. Hear her in the double-note rejoinder in the D flat Waltz, Op 70 No 2 and her poetic delicacy will stay with you. Yet in the Op 42 Waltz's whirling mix of duple- and triple-time she is more chivying than affectionate and, overall, for all her fluency and musicianship, these are hardly readings to rival those of Lipatti or Cortot (the pianist who, for Daniel Barenboim, 'found the opium in Chopin').

Yet in the long term it is Lympney's love of Russian music that leaves the most indelible impression. (Her mother had lived and worked in Russia, and the name Moura is a Russian diminutive of Mary, Lympney's Christian name.) For me her 1951 set of the Rachmaninov Preludes (she recorded them three times) is the most musicianly of all, even bearing in mind masterly recordings by Vladimir Ashkenazy and others. Her way with the infamous C sharp Prelude, Op 2 recreates a tired war-horse, reduced by many to near cliché, with a special vividness and commitment. And in the martial torrents of the B flat Prelude her command never tempts her into the sort of virtuosity that can make you feel you are having a water-canonical fired at your midriff. What gentle melancholy in No 3, that most wistful of minuets, and who but Lympney could voice and colour so memorably the G minor Prelude's central theme, one sumptuous even by Rachmaninov's standards. Her lucidity in the intricate maze of the A flat Prelude contrasts with, say, Eileen Joyce's close-to-the-edge recording and she is unforgettable in the valedictory close to Op 23. In the even richer Op 32 she is in faultless control of the ultra-Russian B minor Prelude's storms (No 4) without losing a wit of excitement, and she is deeply affecting in the Brahmsian richness of No 8, with its surprising fountain-like cascade finish.

In Rachmaninov's Third Concerto she makes you recall a brave and acute opinion by Edward Sackville-West who commented that it may seem a mere specialist's whim to prefer Lympney to Horowitz (for Rachmaninov 'the only player in the world of this piece') but she has a way of bringing out an underlying emotional fervour less evident in Horowitz's various and admittedly stunning recordings. At the first *più mosso* there is more music than an over-familiar rattle of machine-gun fire and, throughout, melodic outlines are kept admirably clear amid the maelstrom of surrounding figuration. She plays the simpler of the two cadenzas (the heavy weight alternative was not yet in fashion) with a thrilling burst



Moura Lympney 'could skim the music's surface with the speed and agility of a water boatman'

of speed and clarity, and if for Russians her overall restraint can seem too limiting, her taste more a product of English reserve than Russian passion, her command is never in doubt, her bravura scintillating as required. She leaves others to rant and rave: for her the Third Concerto is always a musical masterpiece rather than an engine for display. This is also a recording that survives those once unfortunate cuts.

Then, at a less exalted level, there is the Khachaturian Piano Concerto. Lympney gave the first British performance of this show-piece – Armenia seen through the eyes of Tinsel Town – and clearly relished its outrageous aplomb. Lovers of the flexatone (a kind of rattle come swanee whistle) will be pleased that it is included in the central *Andante* and Lympney's dazzle in the finale is as vivacious and pointed as you could wish, on a par with William Kapell, whose abandon set the American musical world ablaze during the early part of his tragically short-lived career.

Space as well as time is the enemy and there is so much more. Lympney's *Feux Follets* (most difficult of all Liszt's études) is a marvel of delicacy, her observance of the *allegretto* an alternative to Sviatoslav

Richter's astonishing *prestissimo*. She negotiates every hurdle of Brahms's *Paganini Variations* (Book 2) with the greatest of ease, her focus once more on musical, rather than acrobatic, skill, her technique more dextrous than bludgeoning. There is memorably luminous Franck (the *Symphonie Variations*) and if her Schumann *Etudes Symphoniques* are less nimble and acute than in, say, Géza Anda's recording, Lympney's musical quality is in sharp contrast to Pogorelich's exhibitionism, his flaunting slow tempo.

Dame Moura was an extraordinary pianist but only in the sense that her performances were blessed by an intense preparation that allowed her to achieve her characteristically unclouded vision. And so, for that ever elusive Christmas present (and a snip at about £18), for those who value magical pianism and, above all, unsullied musicianship, my recommendation is total. And there is much, much more to add, to the growing rather than receding Lympney Legend. **G**

THE RECORDING

Moura Lympney 'Milestones of a Legend'
Documents ⑩ 600403

Opera



Richard Wigmore warms to Philippe Jaroussky's Handel album:

'Like all the best countertenors, Jaroussky makes the reams of coloratura both glittering and dramatically vivid' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 112**



Alexandra Coghlann welcomes a disc of Stradella arias:

'Jeffery's light soprano rides the waves of musical emotion with ease and a wonderful expressive abandon' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 116**

Debussy

Pelléas et Mélisande

Christian Gerhaher bar.....Pelléas
Magdalena Kožená mez.....Mélisande
Gerald Finley bass.....Golaud
Franz-Josef Selig bass.....Arkel
Bernarda Fink contr.....Geneviève
Elias Mäder treb.....Yniold
Joshua Bloom bass.....Doctor/Shepherd
London Symphony Chorus and Orchestra / Sir Simon Rattle
LSO Live (S) (4) (2) + (2) LS00790
(165 • DDD/DSD • DTS-HD MA5.1 & stereo)
Recorded live at the Barbican, London, January 9 & 10, 2016
Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



This is a takeover from Berlin of a Peter Sellars platform staging of Debussy's opera. Sellars's directing of the cast (identical in London to Berlin) has sorted out clearly motivation and mood. It has also, by virtue of his stage layout's resiting of parts of the orchestra, brought new focus to the dramatic intentions of Debussy's scoring (listen especially to the heartbeat timpani's contributions).

Rather like the opera's potential audience, conductors of *Pelléas* tend to divide into fanatics or absentees. Previous performances have clearly identified Rattle as one of the former. He negotiates a fine balance between the score's intentional moments of stasis – often moments of the richest orchestral imagination – and the drama of a story whose characters' continual refusal to see or face realities justifies Sellars's allusions to an Alfred Hitchcock film. (In Act 4, remember, just before his death, Pelléas is still saying that he cannot see anyone when an evidently hostile Golaud is right behind him and Mélisande.)

Rattle maintains both a clear pulse in individual scenes and a through line which positively celebrates Debussy's and Maeterlinck's radical intercutting of scenes

of varied physical and emotional locations in the central acts. He uses a broad and detailed orchestral palette but, again, the balance is very well made between the score's wide range of dynamics – nicely observed too by Ernest Ansermet on his early and not to be ignored Decca recording – and unnecessary Romantic weight, an indulgence which Karajan (Warner), who often seems to be treading a similar path to Rattle, does not avoid. The obvious influence of *Parsifal* on the interludes is clearly felt but not laboured. Rattle's tempos are also attentive to the natural pace and rhythm of conversation rather than throwing up abstract musical climaxes on their own. The LSO's playing throughout is at a high level of virtuosity – try, for example, the fast-moving accompaniment to Golaud's pulling Mélisande around by the hair in Act 4 scene 2.

Aside from the Montreal-born Gerald Finley there are no natural French speakers in the cast – but don't worry. The language side, an annoying glitch on some rival recordings, has been fully taken care of. The French of the German Pelléas and Arkel is especially well studied. Both Gerhaher and Kožená are good at not over-egging the pudding of their confusions and naiveties, or indeed flirtatiousness, which fixes even more attention on the words. Finley manages to make Golaud's rages frightening without the 'evil' melodrama that bigger, darker voices have brought to the role. And the older generation are clearly – and again, simply – focused on what they are saying, Selig's Arkel moving in his defence of the dying Mélisande in Act 5.

Pelléas has been lucky on disc. Aside from the first Ansermet – which has a sense of wonder when every page is turned – there is the famous old Désormière, an impeccable if slightly cool mainline version in inevitably dated sound. Irresistible – and distinctly different in approach – are the Haitink/French Radio version (beautiful conducting, very sad and perhaps his finest opera recording to date) and Pierre Boulez,

the dedicatee of the present recording. The latter is remarkable for a no-nonsense black-and-white statement of the notes which makes the score sound even more contemporary than it was.

If we are talking competition, this new version (which, as I have already hinted, sounds exceptionally clean and fine) scores high up the list and is highly recommended – an early jewel in the crown of Simon Rattle's assumption of the principal conductorship of the LSO.

Mike Ashman

Selected comparisons:

Ansermet (5/52^R, 4/93^R) (ELOQ) ELQ480 0133
Désormière (8/88^R) (EMI/WARN) ▶ 345770-2
Boulez (4/92^R) (SONY) ▶ 88697 52722-2
Haitink (4/02) (NAÏV) V4923

Dvořák

Rusalka

Magdalena Polkowska sop.....Rusalka
Tadeusz Szlenkier ten.....Prince
Katarzyna Nowak-Stańczyk sop....Foreign Princess
Jacek Greszta bass.....Water Goblin
Darina Gapicz mez.....Ježibaba
Pavlo Tolstoy ten.....Gamekeeper
Victoria Vatutina sop.....Kitchen Boy
Chorus and Orchestra of the Opera Nova,

Bydgoszcz / Maciej Figas

Stage director Kristina Wuss

Video director Marek Czajkowski
Dux (F) DVD DUX8178 (134' • PAL • 16:9 • DD5.1 & DD stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Bydgoszcz Opera Festival, April 28, 2012
Includes synopsis



First, a brief geography lesson. Bydgoszcz (nicknamed Little Berlin) is the eighth largest city in Poland, with a population of around 360,000, located about halfway between Gdańsk and Łódź, straddling the Brda River. On the basis of this production of Opera Nova's *Rusalka*, its opera company is in extremely fine shape. The geography is



Natural pace and rhythm: Gerald Finley and Magdalena Kožená star in a platform staging of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* under Simon Rattle

important since director Kristina Wuss sets events in Bydgoszcz itself. The city has never had a prince and nothing remains of its castle other than a foundation stone. It has no lake either ... but it has a river and this is central to Wuss's production, which depicts Bydgoszcz in the 19th century.

Vodník (the Water Goblin) is here represented as Jerzy Kędziora's sculpture *Man Crossing the River* (commemorating Poland's entry into the European Union) which is suspended over the Brda near the opera house. Among the landmarks that would be familiar to the audience is the fountain *Children Playing with a Goose*, which appears as a statue in Act 2. The Jerzy Sulima-Kamiński Bridge forms the basis of Mariusz Napierała's beautiful set. Sprites frolic in the water beneath the bridge while the human inhabitants cross it, taking an evening moonlit stroll. The bridge moves during Rusalka's transformation by Ježibaba, a femme fatale figure here, to take us to its far bank. Act 2 looks handsome: a tram trundles across the bridge beneath a giant moon. The Foreign Princess is a vamp in red silk lingerie, eventually luring the prince into her clam-shaped boudoir!

There is much poignant imagery too. During the Song to the Moon, Rusalka lights a candle and fixes it to a wreath of flowers before casting it down the river. The 'love at first sight' meeting between the Prince and Rusalka is utterly believable, the Prince teetering along a plank on the surface of the river to reach her. Rusalka's leap from the bridge in Act 3 is dramatically done.

On the whole, vocal performances are very good, if a little lighter than you might expect in this repertoire, which approaches Wagnerian weight. Magdalena Polkowska is a charming, girlish Rusalka, her lyric soprano beautifully poised. Tadeusz Szlenkier's Prince is similarly light-voiced but they are well matched. Jacek Greszta is a sturdy Vodník and Darina Gapicza is a vibrant Ježibaba. The only disappointment is Katarzyna Nowak-Stańczyk's throaty Foreign Princess.

Maciej Figas draws committed playing from the Opera Nova Orchestra and the whole performance is captured in wonderful 5.1 Dolby Digital sound. A downside is that the DVD's only cue points are at the start of each act, but otherwise this is a terrific achievement all round. **Mark Pullinger**

Glass

The Trial

Johnny Herford bar Josef K
Michael Bennett ten Guard 1 (Franz)/Block
Nicholas Folwell bass-bar Guard 2 (Willem)/Usher/Clerk of the Court/Priest
Michael Druiett bass Inspector/Uncle
Rowan Hellier mez Frau Grubach/Washerwoman
Amanda Forbes sop Fräulein Bürstner/Leni
Gwion Thomas bar Magistrate/Assistant/Lawyer Huld
Paul Curievici ten Titorelli/Flogger/Student (Berthold)
Music Theatre Wales Ensemble / Michael Rafferty
 Orange Mountain Music Ⓛ ② OMM0118 (108' • DDD)
 Recorded live at the Linbury Theatre, Royal Opera House, London, October 15, 2014
 Includes libretto



Music Theatre Wales's heartening and astutely developed relationship with Philip Glass is over 25 years old and reached its apex when the composer wrote his Kafka-based opera *The Trial* for the company. MTW subsequently

gave the work's premiere at the Linbury Theatre, Covent Garden, in October 2014 and that is the production captured here in a BBC Radio 3 recording.

The relationship is fully in evidence in this tight, idiomatic, confident yet nuanced performance under Michael Rafferty. Johnny Herford's consistently warm-voiced portrayal of Josef K, the unfortunate but stoic soul subjected to a trial so ambiguous and all-encompassing that it feels born of the mind rather than of reality, is as well-studied as it is dramatic and impassioned. There are impressive turns from the bright-voiced Amanda Forbes (Fraulein Bürstner and Leni) and the commanding Nicholas Folwell (Usher, Clerk of the Court, Priest). The 12-piece band is sleek, flexible and pretty much faultless.

Which brings us to the elephant in the room: Glass's music. It could hardly wish for better legal counsel than *Gramophone*'s Pwyll ap Siôn, who writes in the booklet that the score taps the crippling doubts and uncertainties of Kafka's characters – a 'music theatre of the mind'. It certainly does. Not so convincing is James Hawes's claim in a parallel essay that 'if any artist alive can truly catch what is at the heart of Kafka ... it is Philip Glass'. A bold statement given that Glass's mode of expression remains on its narrow course while the dramatic and psychological implications of the language of music have exploded around it.

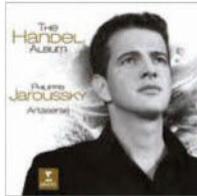
The operatic problem with *The Trial* is that, unlike *Satyagraha* or comparable works, it is founded on exchange-based dialogue and technical explanation. Glass's four-bar structures render that text-setting laughably foursquare, not least when he has to crowbar a slightly longer passage of text in and can't help but force it into a gabble. You might argue that helps conjure the strange, procedural, facelessly bureaucratic world in which Josef K finds himself. I would counter that, along with the consistent tempo, it becomes both musically and theatrically frustrating and is simply un-operatic.

Michael Nyman's masterpiece of minimalist opera *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* feeds off the dramatic potential of setting a rigid metrical tempo and then shifting it scene-to-scene, flashpoint-to-flashpoint. Glass's pulse is rigid throughout; scene changes are jarringly banal and his reluctance to portray real-time dramatic situations in his score – as when Leni and Josef K are caught copulating on the floor together – count against it in the music theatre stakes. If you can get around that, there is much to enjoy in this performance, but it seems ironic to

me that the only truly heart-stopping moments come when, yes, that pulse itself stops. **Andrew Mellor**

Handel

Amadigi di Gaula – Sussurrate, onde vezzose.
Ezio – Pensa a serbarmi, o cara. **Flavio** – Privarmi ancora dell'amata beltà ... Rompo i lacci; Son pur felice al fine ... Bel contento. **Giustino** – Chi mi chiama alla gloria? ... Se parla nel mio cor.
Imeneo – Se potessero i sospir miei.
Radamisto – Ombra cara; Qual nave smarrita; Vieni, d'empietà mostro crudele ... Vile, se mi dai vita. **Riccardo primo** – Agitato da fiera tempeste. **Serse** – Si, la voglio e l'otterrò. **Siroe** – Son stanco, ingiusti Numi ... Deggio morire, o stelle.
Tolomeo – Che più si tarda omai ... Stille amare
Artaserse / Philippe Jaroussky *countererten*
 Erato ⑤ 9029 57596-6 (72' • DDD • T/T)
 Deluxe edition: 9029 57744-5



An all-Handel album from Philippe Jaroussky was always waiting to happen.

And it's refreshing that the French falsettist – as much counter-soprano as countertenor – has avoided the obvious in favour of operas that, except for *Serse* and (to a lesser extent) *Radamisto*, remain on the Handelian fringes. Rarity goes hand in hand with maximum variety of expression, in numbers that range from a rampaging bravura aria from *Riccardo primo* to a dulcet pastoral from *Amadigi* and an equally beguiling siciliano from *Ezio*. Probing deeper, Tolomeo's 'poison' aria, permeated by stifled violin gasps, and Siroe's noble, anguished prison scena are just the kind of pieces in which Handel invariably left his operatic rivals standing.

Many of these arias were composed for Handel's star castrato of the 1720s, Senesino, an insufferable tantrum queen idolised in London for his sweet, clear tone and mastery of both the 'pathetic' and the brilliant styles. Tantrums apart, that description seems apt for Philippe Jaroussky, who excels alike in limpid tenderness, soul-searching and rafter-raising virtuosity.

With a brighter, flutier timbre than his counterparts Iestyn Davies and the more muscular-toned Max Emanuel Cencic, Jaroussky soars effortlessly, with no hint of hootiness, up to top Gs and As. But his middle range is now fuller and warmer, heard to specially eloquent effect in Radamisto's two laments and the gentle *Ezio* aria, enhanced by the sensitive, even sensuous phrasing and colouring of the cosmopolitan period band. Jaroussky's

dramatic intensity and expressive Italian pay rich dividends in the *Siroe* and *Tolomeo* solos, and in Radamisto's 'Vile, se mi dai vita', where voice and strings vie in venomous indignation at the ghastly Tiridate. Like all the best countertenors (and, one imagines, their castrato predecessors), Jaroussky makes the reams of coloratura both glittering and dramatically vivid, not least in Guido's coruscating 'vengeance' aria from *Flavio* – a performance that would bring the house down in concert. My only cavil, more trifling now than it would have been in the 18th century, is that Jaroussky lacks a true trill. But this is a winner of a Handel recital whose appeal should reach far beyond the singer's numerous fans. The recording is agreeably resonant, while the classily produced booklet includes an informative essay by David Vickers that deftly places each item in its dramatic context.

Richard Wigmore

Monteverdi

Orfeo

Cyril Auvity ten *Orfeo*
Hannah Morrison sop *La Musica/Euridice*
Paul Agnew ten *Eco/Apollo*
Miriam Allan sop *Ninfa/Proserpina*
Lea Desandre contr *Messenger/Speranza*
Carlo Vistoli *countereten* *Spirto infernale/Pastore*
Sean Clayton ten *Pastore*
Zachary Wilder ten *Spirto infernale/Pastore*
Antonio Abete bass *Plutone/Pastore/Spirto infernale*
Cyril Costanzo bass *Caronte/Spirto infernale*
Les Arts Florissants / Paul Agnew
Stage director Paul Agnew
 Harmonia Mundi ⑤ (DVD + Blu-ray) HMD980 9062/3
 (3h 28' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS5.1 • O)
 Recorded live at the Théâtre de Caen,
 February 28, 2017



This production, filmed at the Théâtre de Caen in February 2017, is a natural extension of Les Arts Florissants' five-year madrigals project. None of the music is 'conducted' by Paul Agnew, and instead all participants prove a shared affinity for democratic music-making – although there must also have been meticulous preparation and collaboration because portable instrumentalists (strings, recorders, cornetti, trombones) are in costume and on stage most of the time, playing from memory, and integrated into the scenes throughout. Only the bulky continuo instruments (various keyboards, harp) are fixed in positions on either side of the

stage – two lute players move between the centre stage and continuo flanks as practicalities and dramatic sense dictate.

There is a wondrous simplicity and beauty to Agnew's staging, which looks as if Caravaggio painted an equinox ceremony taking place in a stone circle; nymphs and shepherds celebrate the marriage of Orfeo and Euridice while also worshipping the sun (ie Apollo, who watches immutably over the world of mortals from the back of the stage). La Musica's prologue, sung beautifully by Hannah Morrison, is elegantly restrained in its physical stage movements. Bucolic fun is depicted in a relaxed and natural way: tenor duets are sung with suppleness by Zachary Wilder and Sean Clayton, and 'Vi ricorda o boschi ombrosi' is staged as a game in which Orfeo improvises a song on verses supplied by a succession of friends. The artistic kinship between Mantuan madrigals and the shepherds' anguished response to news of Euridice's death ('Ahi caso acerbo') has seldom been made as explicit in theatrical representations as it is here.

Simple use of lighting produces a ribbon of blue on the floor to represent the Styx and a backdrop of crimson conjures Hades; the faces of the infernal spirits are hidden by black-hooded robes (and yet their moralising ensembles are sung with flawless precision). Cyril Auvity's tremulous and emphatic singing of the title-role has unstinting dramatic commitment: the shadowy silhouettes of the obbligato instrumentalists in 'Possente spirto' appear as if the underworld is conjured to do Orfeo's bidding). Miriam Allan's gentle Proserpina and Antonio Abete's dignified Plutone produce a tender depiction of devoted love. Upon losing Euridice forever, Orfeo's malevolent bitterness is aptly shown as the half-human part of the demigod, reinforcing that he fails because he cannot master his own passions – a judgement sung without compassion by the infernal spirits but reiterated by Agnew's Apollo with fatherly benevolence; the apotheosis in Act 5 has rarely seemed so touching and convincing as it does here.

David Vickers

Ostrčil



Jack's Kingdom (Honzovo království)^a

Přemysl Kočí	bass-bar	Devil
Josef Celerin	bass	Father
Milada Jirásková	sop	Žena Ivanova
Ludmila Hanzalíková	mez	Žena Ondřejová
Antonín Votava	ten	Ivan
Zdeněk Otava	bar	Andrew
Ivo Žídek	ten	Honza/Jack
Jaroslav Veverka	bass	King
Jaroslava Vymazalová	sop	Princess

Prague Radio Chorus and Symphony Orchestra /

Václav Jiráček

Calvary, Op 24^b

Czech Philharmonic Orchestra / Václav Neumann

Supraphon mono Ⓛ ② SU4224-2 (138' • AAD)

Recorded ^a1954, ^b1957

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



Usually known in English – if at all – as *Johnny's Kingdom*, the satirical fairy tale

Honzovo království was the last opera to be written by Otakar Ostrčil (1879–1935), who died in post as director of the Prague National Opera, four months after its successful premiere. His brother-in-law adapted a short story by Tolstoy, *Ivan the Fool*, into three pacy acts that testify more to Ostrčil's experience as a man of the theatre than to any singular gifts as a composer.

Ivan/Jack/Johnny/Honza (in the Czech) is a simple lad of good character with the Devil on his case and two bad elder brothers who represent the evils of war and capitalism. Aside from the spiteful asides of their wives, and some jolly choral interjections, no female part of substance is heard until the middle of Act 2 in the person of a sick Princess. She is cured by Jack's homespun wisdom and faith in human nature, which duly sees off the Devil and his brothers with the unconvincing aid of a Christian faith abruptly professed at the last.

When conductors of his era wrote symphonies it was often too obvious that their heads were full of other men's music. Having absorbed the undulating melodies of *Rusalka*, the stylised distance of *Oedipus Rex*, the scenic cuts of *Wozzeck* and more besides, Ostrčil produced a synthesis without a strong personality of its own, cast in a single key of nervous intensity which is only exaggerated by a boxy radio-studio recording. Even the snare-drum cadenza in the last act is surely a hand-me-down from Nielsen's Fifth Symphony, first played 11 years previously.

Ivo Žídek takes the vocal honours: a tireless, generous tenor in the title-role. The others are more or less character singers – as the Princess, Jaroslava Vymazalová is notably shrill in a role calling for Roxana's powers of seduction – but the dark, Wotan-size bass-baritone of Přemysl Kočí is rather wasted on the Devil, who has the first and last words but not the best tunes.

The Supraphon remastering engineers have done a decent job on what appear to

be intractable original tapes. In considerably better (mono) sound, the bonus is a half-hour set of 14 orchestra variations that would more helpfully be known under the English title of *The Stations of the Cross*. From the opening unison statement of the theme on full brass, *Calvary* unleashes Mahlerian tendencies kept on a tighter rein in the comic opera. This theme may bear a family resemblance to the *Larghetto* march-figure at the heart of Elgar's Second Symphony but comparison between the grimly relentless progress of *Calvary* and the *Enigma* Variations will not work in Ostrčil's favour. Never apparently issued before, this recording is very marginally different from one made in 1980 by the same forces, also for Supraphon.

Peter Quantrill



Puccini

La bohème

Irina Lungu sop Mimì

Giorgio Berrugi ten Rodolfo

Kelebogile Besong sop Musetta

Massimo Cavalletti bar Marcello

Benjamin Cho bar Schaunard

Gabriele Sagona bass Colline

Matteo Peirone bass Benoît/Alcindoro

Cullen Gandy ten Parpignol

Chorus and Orchestra of the Teatro Regio,

Turin / Gianandrea Noseda

Stage director Álex Ollé

Video director Tiziano Mancini

C Major Entertainment Ⓛ **DVD** 742608;

⌚ **Blu-ray** 742704 (112' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, October 12, 2016

Includes synopsis



Staged to mark the 120th anniversary of the 1896 premiere of *La bohème* at Turin's old Teatro Regio (destroyed by a fire in 1938), this new production of Puccini's warhorse offers an enjoyable, effective updating. Director Álex Ollé presents a semi-abstract cityscape (the sets are by his Fura dels Baus colleague Lluc Castells) which is not in the least bit Parisian but grandly atmospheric, a riot of illuminated windows surrounding, in Acts 1 and 4, a warren-like array of rooms and stairways.

We can see Mimì in her apartment ahead of her entrance – the power fails in the building, and, in rather a nice touch, is reinstated just as Rodolfo touches that tiny little hand of hers – as well as various other peripheral comings and goings, which Tiziano Mancini's occasionally overactive

camera direction can be over-keen to point out. There's an infectious party atmosphere in Act 2, where Café Momus is staffed by futuristic waitresses and Parpignol doesn't feel entirely trustworthy. The grimness of modern urban life is never far away, especially in Act 3, set in some insalubrious corner of town frequented by workmen and working girls.

Some of the show's modern touches inevitably don't really work. Would the slobby Benoît we have here be vain enough to succumb to the Bohemians' flattery, for example, even with the aid of a joint? Mimi's death, of cancer here, also raises inevitable questions about this modern city's healthcare provision. None of that matters too much, though, and the modern additions can't hide the fact that this is a traditional *Bohème* at heart, true to the work's spirit.

It also features an eminently likeable cast. Neither Irina Lungu's Mimì nor Giorgio Berrugi's Rodolfo is vocally ideal – she's a bit overwrought and short on lyrical warmth, he is rather unrefined above the stave – but they make a plausible, sympathetic couple. Massimo Cavalletti is a sincere, touching Marcello, and Kelebogile Besong a deliciously over-the-top Musetta, as the staging demands. Benjamin Cho's Schaunard and Gabriele Sagona as Colline complete the Bohemian quartet well, and the children's chorus, in particular, is full of life.

It was a young Toscanini who presided over that first Turin *Bohème*, and Gianandrea Noseda doesn't disappoint here, conducting with sensitivity and refinement, never indulgent but consistently moving. The orchestral playing, favoured by the sound balance, is of very high quality. All told, this is a touching and recommendable modern-dress *Bohème*. **Hugo Shirley**

Purcell



The Fairy Queen

Jennifer Vyvyan sop.....First Fairy/Mystery/Second Woman
Elsie Morison sop.....Second Fairy/Night/Chinese
.....Woman/Spring/First Woman/Juno
Peter Pears ten.....Phoebus/Autumn/First Chinese Man
John Whitworth counterten.....Second Chinese Man/Secrecy/Summer
Thomas Hemsley bass.....Drunken Poet/Coridon/Hymen
Trevor Anthony bass.....Sleep/Winter
Peter Boggis ten.....Mopsa
The St Anthony Singers; Boyd Neel Orchestra / Anthony Lewis
Decca Eloquence ⑤ ② ELQ482 7449 (129' • DDD)
Recorded 1957

Purcell

The Fairy Queen

Caroline Mutel, Virginie Pochon, Hjörðis Thébault
sops **Caitlin Hulcup** mez **Christophe Baska**
counterten **Samuel Boden, Anders Dahlin, Julien**
Picard tens **Guillaume Andrieux, Kevin Greenlaw, Ronan Nédélec** bars **Frédéric Caton** bass
Les Nouveaux Caractères / Sébastien d'Hérin
Glossa ⑤ ② GCD922702 (123' • DDD)
Includes synopsis and libretto



Anthony Lewis edited *The Fairy Queen* for the Purcell Society and conducted its first complete recording (L'Oiseau-Lyre, 1957). This long-overdue reissue is the first time his groundbreaking recording has been available in modern formats. His illuminating sleeve note and dramatically apposite handling of the innovative Boyd Neel Orchestra offer plenty of pleasure. Sixty years on, various aspects might demand readjustment from listeners weaned on period-instrument versions – such as a liberal dose of string vibrato (and at times heavy bowing), fulsome choral singing that tends to be majestic rather than nimble, moderate tempos on the slow side by current standards (often none the worse for that), and no hints of French-style inflections anywhere.

Nevertheless, Lewis sketches contrasting dramatic moods and varied musical colours with nuanced imagination. Elsie Morison's sensitive Night (with beautifully shaded muted strings) and Trevor Anthony's icy Winter (ample harmonic richness wrung from softly sonorous strings) are spellbinding. Jennifer Vyvyan's pealing runs in 'Hark! The echoing air', Morison's profoundly moving Plaint (I assume it's Morison, although it's not credited in the booklet; either way the violin solo is played tenderly by Granville Jones) and Peter Pears's floating lightness in the middle section of 'Thus the gloomy world' are impeccably Purcellian by any yardstick. Countertenor John Whitworth achieves a graceful balance of head and chest voice in 'One charming night' (Lewis's use of flutes rather than recorders is one of the most obvious ways in which performance practices have changed). Thomas Hemsley's Drunken Poet is an endearing favourite uncle with embarrassing literary pretensions who has clearly been at the sherry again; the fairies' teasing pinches of him are impishly mischievous rather than cruelly sadistic.

Indeed, the shifting moods of comedy, tragedy, charm and sense of spectacle are transparent throughout Lewis's congenial performance.

A brand new recording tries to reinvent the wheel. Sébastien d'Hérin's loquacious essay praises that Purcell's music is 'composed with discernment and care, great emphasis being placed on detail', and that personalities 'emerge by way of light brushstrokes'. However, sporadic applications of anachronistic cornett, serpent, regal, viol, harp and copious *ad libitum* percussion are less like light brushstrokes than broadly lathered caprices. D'Hérin claims that his 'personal orchestration' avoids being 'a prisoner of that tradition which often ends up narrowing our choices'. The inference is that Purcell needs additional artificial flavourings – and yet it transpires that they seldom improve the recipe. *Les Nouveaux Caractères*' playing tends to be bold and sometimes even astringent, although a lovely performance of the Rondeau is realised with sensual *inégal*s. Sharp staccato in the scene for the Drunken Poet has sizzling energy, although briskness leaves no room for Kevin Greenlaw to convey humour. Fruity organ registration and rippling harp are disturbances during an uneven Masque of Night: Caroline Mutel's strident 'See, even Night herself is here' is hindered by the strings' forgoing discretion, whereas Anders Dahlin's languid high tenor is matched aptly by seductive recorders and lush continuo in 'One charming night' – but aggressive bowing and an intrusive regal mutate the Dance for the Followers of Night into a grotesque nightmare.

The symphony in which swans come forward is so exaggerated and percussion-laden that the bevy must be monstrous and clumsy. The Masque for the Four Seasons comes off best; the clipped character of the bookend choruses is inelegant, but Guillaume Andrieux's declamatory Phoebus and each of the four seasonal soloists are spot-on – particularly Frédéric Caton's sinewy Winter. D'Hérin's choices of obbligato cornett and chordal viola da gamba during the Plaint are unhelpful distractions, and unbridled vocal embellishment in 'Hark! The echoing air' is tasteless. On the other hand, Samuel Boden's relaxed fluency in 'Thus the gloomy world' is Purcellian singing of supreme finesse. Conceived by d'Hérin as an experimental alternative, the outcome is a curate's egg.

David Vickers



Grandeur and fire: Plácido Domingo takes on another baritone role in a Milan staging of Verdi's *I due Foscari* – see review on page 116

Rossini

Demetrio e Polibio

Sofia Mchedlishvili sop. Lisinga

Victoria Yarovaya mez. Siveno

César Arrieta ten. Eumene

Luca Dall'Amico bass-bar. Polibio

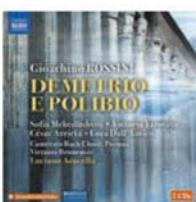
Camerata Bach Choir, Poznań;

Virtuosi Brunensis / Luciano Acocella

Naxos M ② 8 660405/6 (112 • DDD)

Recorded live at the Königliches Kurtheater, Bad Wildbad, Germany, July 17 & 22, 2016

Includes synopsis; Italian libretto available at naxos.com



It was in 1809-10, during Rossini's final year at Bologna's Liceo Musicale, that he was invited by the singer-composer Domenico Mombelli to contribute numbers for a two-act *dramma serio*, *Demetrio e Polibio*, which Mombelli's theatrically literate wife had designed for performance by the family's touring opera troupe. In the event, Rossini wrote most of the score – all but the Overture and a 25-minute stretch (Nos 12-15) in the opera's second act – and wrote it, such was the quality of the singers in the Mombelli troupe, at a level of

inspiration that surpasses anything you will find in *La cambiale di matrimonio*, his first professional commission written later that year.

Love and unrighteous anger are the emotional drivers of this neatly crafted four-hander involving the Parthian king Polibio, his daughter Lisinga's love for Polibio's stepson Siveno and the unwelcome reappearance of the young man's natural father, the Syrian king Demetrio. Mombelli himself, a tenor famed for his 'strong and vibrant' style, took the role of Demetrio, with the older of his teenage daughters, the high coloratura Ester Mombelli, playing Lisinga opposite her younger sister in the *travesti* mezzo role of Siveno.

When the troupe staged the opera in Rome in May 1812, the reception bordered on the rapturous, with the erotically alluring close-harmony love duet 'Questo cor ti giura amore' published by Ricordi within the month. Stendhal later recalled: 'Each successive item was a banquet, a miracle of singing at its purest, of melody at its most enchanting.'

At least one live theatre recording appeared on LP in the 1970s, though it was not until the publication of Daniele Carnini's critical edition, and its performance at the 2010 Rossini Opera

Festival in Pesaro with a superb quartet of singers thrillingly conducted by Corrado Rovaris, that the power of the piece fully hit home. That production is preserved on an ArtHaus DVD not previously noticed in these columns. The new set, by contrast, is a CD release, taken from a staging at the 2016 Rossini in Wildbad festival.

Where the young lovers are concerned, honours are more or less even between the two productions. The Russian mezzo Victoria Yarovaya (a graduate of the Accademia Rossiniana in Pesaro) is Wildbad's vocally distinguished Siveno; and though Sofia Mchedlishvili's voicing of the high-wire coloratura role of Lisinga may not be as pitch-perfect as that of Pesaro's María José Moreno, Mchedlishvili's performance is itself something of a tour de force.

The Wildbad men are less good. Even as a teenager, Rossini wrote memorably for the bass voice, something you won't deduce from Luca Dall'Amico's often woolly-sounding and legato-starved singing of Polibio. The Demetrio, tenor César Arrieta, pleases when Demetrio pleases but fails to catch the character's incendiary moods as Pesaro's Yijie Shi does to thrilling effect in, say, the blazing end – shades of Verdi's 'Di quella pira' – of his big Act 1 aria.

Luciano Acocella conducts sedately: too sedately at times, which may explain the lack of a sense of occasion surrounding the Wildbad performance. The Pesaro staging has its peculiarities, though since these are mainly dimly lit sideshows they tend to be visually unobtrusive. As a performance, however, it is terrific and very much the version to have. **Richard Osborne**

Comparative version:

Rovaris (ARTH) PWP 101 647

Stradella

'Lagrime e sospiri - Opera and Oratorio Arias'

La forza dell'amore paterno - Ferma, regina, ascolta ... Morirò; Lasso, che feci; O morire,

o libertà; Presto, corri ad armarti! ... Non vedi che giove. **Le gare dell'amore eroico** - Overture.

Moro per amore - Overture; A che tardi a morir,

misero core; Col mio sangue comprarei ... Per

pietà; Furie terribili. **San Giovanni Battista** -

Overture; Deh che più tardi ... Queste lagrime

e sospiri. **Santa Pelagia** - Overture; Quanto mi

alletta ... Sono i crini aurati stami. **La Susanna** -

Overture; Da chi spero aita, o cieli

Chantal Santon Jeffery sop
Galilei Consort / Benjamin Chénier vn

Alpha ® ALPHA297 (58' • DDD)
Includes texts and translations



Alessandro

Stradella's music is currently enjoying a moment, and not

before time. Ensemble Mare Nostrum's Stradella Project is now four volumes into its comprehensive recording survey of the composer's oratorios, leading the revival of fortunes that Stradella's expressive and multifaceted music has long deserved. This recording from soprano Chantal Santon Jeffery and France's Galilei Consort cherry-picks from both the composer's sacred and secular works, as well as his instrumental music, to create a more accessible (and even more persuasive) case for this neglected master.

The problem, as the disc's own notes acknowledge, is that for a long time Stradella (whose fragmented career began in Rome before relocating to Venice and finally Genoa) was better known for his colourful biography than his music. Sex scandals, attempted murders and actual murders may make for a great story but they also bring a certain energy to music comfortable at the emotional extremes.

Take the mad scene from the opera *La forza dell'amore paterno*, for example, which reels and wails in explosive and unexpected musical directions. Jeffery's light soprano rides the waves of musical emotion with

ease, marshalling the shifting moods with precision but also a wonderful expressive abandon. Another opera scene, this one from *Moro per amore*, shows us the 'hell of love' in grotesque musical detail that lurches between despair and fury with bewildering speed thanks to the ferocious brilliance of the Galilei Consort's musicians, directed from the violin by Benjamin Chénier.

The oratorios are no less charged. From its exquisite Overture through both the colourful recitative and the arias, the lovely *Santa Pelagia* charts an appealing course between sensuality (the saint was a former courtesan) and chaste self-control, while *San Giovanni Battista*'s Salome is a young woman terrifyingly in control of her sexual allure and power, reaching its peak in dizzying semiquaver passages that twinkle like the gemstones in Salome's dress as she dances.

Anyone looking for a quick introduction to Stradella's music should find more than enough incentive here to search out more, while those already familiar will take pleasure in the dramatic scope of these fine performances. **Alexandra Coghlan**

Verdi



I due Foscari

Plácido Domingo bar.....Francesco Foscari

Francesco Meli ten.....Jacopo Foscari

Anna Pirozzi sop.....Lucrezia Contarini

Andrea Concetti bass.....Jacopo Loredano

Edoardo Milletti ten.....Barbarigo

Chiara Isotton sop.....Pisana

Azer Rza-Zade ten.....Fante

Modestas Sedlevičius bar.....Servant of the Doge

Chorus and Orchestra of the Teatro alla Scala, Milan / Michele Mariotti

Stage director Alvis Hermanis

Video director Tiziano Mancini

C Major Entertainment ® PWP 742008;

® 742104 (122' + 16' • NTSC • 16.9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • O)

Bonus: Ioan Holender interviews Plácido Domingo

Recorded live 2016

Includes synopsis



It's little over a year since the last DVD of Verdi's *I due Foscari* starring Plácido Domingo and Francesco Meli was reviewed in these pages. And, with the recent release of Domingo's Los Angeles *Macbeth* (Sony, A/17), we certainly have no shortage of opportunities to experience the veteran former tenor as he explores his new baritone territory. I suspect, though, that only the most completist of his fans will want both his filmed performances of the present work.

C Major's poorly translated booklet note might claim *I due Foscari* as Verdi's 'most darkest and saddest' work (itself a debatable assertion), but it is not one of the composer's most compelling dramas. Though relatively short and underdeveloped in terms of characterisation, it nonetheless offers *Foscari père* some meaty music and juicy scenes. The role, as well as being age-appropriate, seems to sit very well for Domingo's voice. He never really sounds like a baritone – either in terms of colour or an ability to spin a Verdian line – but, as on the earlier film, is in sturdy, confident voice, and the old charisma shows no signs of abandoning him.

Meli repeats his robust turn as Jacopo, singing with considerable ardour and an authentically Italianate catch in the voice, even if his tenor is on the unpolished side. Anna Pirozzi is a terrific Lucrezia. The voice is bright and fearless, and her performance, though rather generalised in dramatic terms, offers a heartening display of old-school Italian vocalism: grand, confident and given extra pungency by the occasional tartness in intonation.

Alvis Hermanis's production, some naff additions notwithstanding, is largely traditional, served up with a big dose of nostalgia. The costumes are period, and the set spends a lot of time framing sepia-toned pictures of old Venice; Gleb Filshitsky's lighting opts for muted pastels – don't be fooled by the picture on the cover. The direction of the principals and chorus is no-frills. The frills come instead in dancing counsellors at the start, synchronised gondoliers and, during the big scene for Jacopo and Lucrezia at the start of Act 2, statues of lions wheeled clumsily around.

If you can stand those irritations, though, this staging might well be preferable to Thaddeus Strassberger's tricksy and messy Covent Garden show, not least because Michele Mariotti's conducting – an expertly judged mixture of grandeur and fire – strikes me as no less impressive than Antonio Pappano's. **Hugo Shirley**

Selected comparison:

Pappano (7/16) (OPAR) PWP OA1207D;

® OABD7197D

Vinci



Didone abbandonata

Roberta Mameli sop.....Didone

Carlo Allemano ten.....Enea

Raffaele Pé counterten.....Iarba

Gabriella Costa sop.....Selene

Marta Pluda mez.....Araspe

Giada Frasconi mez.....Osmida

Orchestra of the Maggio Musicale, Florence / Carlo Ipata

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Stage director **Deda Cristina Colonna**Video director **Matteo Ricchetti**Dynamic **① ③ CDS7788; ② ④ 37788**

(166' • DDD • NTSC • 16.9 • DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0)

Recorded live, January 2017

Includes synopsis



Leonardo Vinci was a busy bee in the winter of 1725–26, working simultaneously on three operas: *Astianatte* for Naples, *Didone abbandonata* for Rome and *Siroe re di Persia* for Venice. The latter two were to librettos by Metastasio, who provided four more before Vinci died – possibly poisoned, a real death-by-chocolate – in 1730. *Didone* was Metastasio's first original libretto, set in 1724 by Domenico Sarro. For Vinci he revised his text, removing some arias and adding new ones. This production from Florence spoils his careful planning by turning the three acts into two; sadly the audio version, on three CDs, fails to take the opportunity of putting this right.

Dido and Aeneas are in love. The story turns on Aeneas's vacillation as he prepares to leave Carthage for ever, to found a new Troy in Italy. He has a rival in Iarba, the Moorish king, who is after Dido as well as her kingdom. Dido pretends to love Iarba, in order to provoke Aeneas's jealousy and force him to stay. Osmida betrays his queen by offering to plead Iarba's suit in return for the throne. Araspe, Iarba's confidant, behaves honourably, refusing to murder Aeneas, but he later seeks him out for a duel. Araspe is in love with Selene, Dido's sister, who only has eyes for Aeneas. Iarba sets fire to the city and Dido, abandoned or betrayed by everyone and cursing the gods, perishes in the flames.

The music is mainly in the light Neapolitan style that was to become popular across Europe. Carlo Ipata is credited with 'Musical Revision'. There's no indication of what this entails: as presented, the scoring is for strings, with or without oboes. The opening Sinfonia features the horns, in *Brandenburg* No 1 mode; they return for Aeneas's last aria, while it's trumpets that sound for Iarba's vengeful 'Cadrà fra poco in cenere'. Vinci's characterisation of the queen is brilliant: she is imperious in 'Son regina', but when she pleads with Aeneas in 'Se vuoi ch'io mora', violins answering the voice, the music has an intensity and beauty worthy of Handel. And her accompanied recitative at the end, so effective dramatically, is perhaps the prototype for similar scenes in

French and Italian opera throughout the 18th century.

Deda Cristina Colonna's production is straightforward, with rather unconvincing fights. The set is simple – steps, scaffolding – and the costumes are lavish. From time to time, silhouettes of figures or ships are seen. In 1726 Rome all the parts, male and female, were sung by men. The cast here is led by Roberta Mameli, in a big blond wig, commanding and vulnerable. Her Aeneas is Carlo Allemano, looking rather like Jack Hawkins's Quintus Arrius in *Ben-Hur*. He, like all his colleagues, tackles the coloratura passages as if they were the easiest thing in the world. The countertenor Raffaele Pé makes a particularly nasty Iarba. The other three characters are well acted and sung. The violins of the Orchestra del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino are not quite top-drawer but the horns are excellent. Carlo Ipata keeps things moving (it's quite a long haul). All in all, this is a useful contribution to our knowledge of a still largely unfamiliar period of opera history.

Richard Lawrence

Wagner

Siegfried

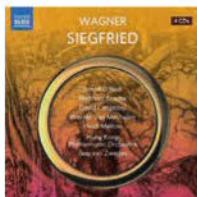
Simon O'Neill *ten* Siegfried
 Matthias Goerne *bass-bar* Wanderer
 Heidi Melton *sop* Brünnhilde
 David Cangelosi *ten* Mime
 Werner Van Mechelen *bass-bar* Alberich
 Deborah Humble *mez* Erda
 Falk Struckmann *bass-bar* Fafner
 Valentina Farcas *sop* Woodbird

Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra /

Jaap van Zweden

Naxos **① ④ 8 660413/16 (4h 2' • DDD)**

Recorded live at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre Hall, January 6-25, 2017

Includes synopsis; German libretto available from naxos.com

A recent article from the Wagner world drew attention to how pleased the composer was by his children's reaction to rehearsals of *Siegfried* for its Bayreuth premiere. (Some of the adults present had been disconcerted by the work's apparent change of direction after *Die Walküre* towards the more naive and folk-like.) Naxos's new live recording – the third in its sequence of *Ring* concert performances from Hong Kong – reflects much of that simple joy and freshness sought by the composer in the opera, surely helped by the fact that many of the performing

company here are new (or new-ish) to their roles.

Naxos's engineers continue to gain a mastery of Wagner's orchestra/cast balance in the city's Cultural Centre Concert Hall. They are matched by van Zweden and his players' developing familiarity with Wagner's sound world. This is a fast *Siegfried*: the forging scene of Act 1, or the Wanderer/Siegfried encounter in Act 3, never hang around to collect or soak up the Romantic weight of, say, Solti, Karajan or Levine. In that respect it reminds me of the agile musical twists and turns of Clemens Krauss's iconic Bayreuth set of 1953 (best heard currently on Pristine – 6/04) – and, indeed, some of the wind-playing in the forest scenes of Act 2 matches the older performance's level of colour and detail.

Earlier on in the evening the Act 1 Siegfried/Mime dialogues have disappointed a little: the tenors' voices as caught here – Simon O'Neill's timbre coming over as quite light, although never short of staying power for the louder moments – can sound disarmingly similar. Also O'Neill (perhaps in an effort not to sound the bully) is gentle in his teasing of his foster-father – but at least (as throughout the performance) cliché is dispensed with. And Cangelosi is a special Mime, almost in the Graham Clark class for characterisation and word-attention without the mannerisms of older interpreters.

In Act 2 this Siegfried is affecting in his thoughts of his mother and enjoys himself winding up the dragon. Here Struckmann, moving into yet another Wagner bass role, enjoys himself with a kind of roar-Gesang, his text emerging out of wild beast noises both comic and frightening. Farcas is a sophisticated, seductively toned *bel canto* Bird, although it helps if you have her words to hand. Van Zweden is especially successful in his pacing of the sometimes anti-climactic pages of the end of the act.

Act 3 has evidently been compiled with care from the takes available to the recording team. Deborah Humble is all there as a more lyrical than argumentative Erda, while Matthias Goerne's singing is of even beauty throughout his range. In the big scene with Siegfried he is also able to take on much of the Wanderer's mordant wit. Van Zweden, who likes to bring each scene of the work to a distinctive end point, carries this god/hero confrontation forwards with a marked climactic *accelerando*. His violins do well in the exposed climb up the mountain. Then, beautifully woken by her conductor and his orchestra, Heidi Melton's Brünnhilde is courageous in the role's high-lying moments and freshly young-sounding.



Breathtaking coloratura: Sabine Devieilhe offers a fascinating and beguiling programme with Les Siècles and François-Xavier Roth

Moreover, O'Neill's Siegfried has retained more than enough voice to make this a genuine love duet. It's exciting. I hope this new lead pair will continue for *Götterdämmerung*.

I've literally lost count of how many Siegfrieds the catalogues now boast. But of the 'legal' ones you should not miss out on the Krauss/Bayreuth, the later Barenboim/Bayreuth (Warner, 9/05, 10/06) and, if you want a representative sample of the age of big voices, the Bodanzky/Metropolitan (vintage 1937, Naxos, 7/92, 3/02). But the sheer youth and first-time excitement of this new release will make an intriguing freshener to your listening.

Mike Ashman

'Mirages'



You'd be forgiven for assuming that this release, featuring a French coloratura soprano in repertoire that includes the *Hamlet* Mad Scene, an extract from *Thaïs* and hit numbers from *Lakmé*, might be a conventional affair. You'd be wrong. As a quick glance down the rest of the track-listing shows, this adventurous programme places those familiar showpieces into the most fascinating of contexts, exploring, to quote Sabine Devieilhe's brief note in the booklet, 'the fantasy image of a different country' that was such an obsession in *fin de siècle* France.

Those *Lakmé* numbers can rarely have sounded fresher or more original, with Devieilhe joined by Marianne Crebassa in a supremely seductive account of the Flower Duet and offering some breathtaking coloratura in the Bell Song. And the latter, in particular, is heard in an entirely different light when juxtaposed with Maurice Delage's remarkable *Quatres Poèmes hindous* (1912) – almost ethnographic in their attempts to capture the strange sounds of an exotic world.

Similarly, the programme underlines that weird orientalist episode that turns up half way through Ophélie's Mad Scene (at 7'20" here) and forces one to hear Thaïs's *charmeuse* afresh – we have just that small

episode from Massenet's wonderful score, rather than any of the title character's numbers. Stravinsky makes a guest appearance with the brief Nightingale's Song from *Le rossignol*, here in its French version.

'Le voyage' from Charles Koechlin's voice-and-piano setting of Tristan Klingsor's *Shéhérazade* poems serves as a beguiling intermediary palate-cleanser, as do Berlioz's own delicate *La mort d'Ophélie* and Debussy's *Le romance d'Arielle* – all three are superbly accompanied by Alexandre Tharaud. The briefest wisp of *Pelléas et Mélisande* – sung with disarming artlessness – takes us into another strange, distant world between the different easts evoked by Messager and Delibes, minimal gaps between tracks allowing them almost to blend into one another.

The performances themselves are terrific. François-Xavier Roth exploits the period instruments of Les Siècles to emphasise the sheer variety of orchestral colours on display (captured in excellent sound) and accompanies with sensitivity. Devieilhe, meanwhile, has a wonderfully instinctive and apparently effortless way with this music. The voice is on the light side but marries seductive delicacy with astonishing pinpoint accuracy, as well as an ability to turn on a sixpence from cool, quasi-instrumental purity to seductive warmth.

All in all, this refreshing, fascinating and beguiling album is impossible to resist. Highly recommended. **Hugo Shirley**

Books

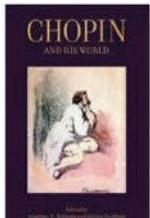


Jeremy Nicholas peruses a volume of disparate essays on Chopin: *'How do we account for the immediate and continuing success of Chopin's music? It's a good question – and well answered'*

Chopin and His World

Edited by Jonathan D Bellman and Halina Goldberg

Princeton University Press, PB, 384pp, £27.95
ISBN 978-0-6911-7776-2



In the 1960s a playwright called NF Simpson became quite popular with his absurdist plays. One of them was called *One Way Pendulum*. This involved teaching weighing machines to speak and, in the last act, a model of a courtroom in the Old Bailey erected in a front living room. Critics and commentators fell over themselves ascribing various metaphors and theories to Simpson's narrative. When they asked Simpson himself what it was all about, the playwright disabused them. 'No', he said, 'I just wanted to write something to make people laugh.'

I was reminded of this when reading the first section of *Chopin and His World*. Chopin is the 28th composer to have a volume devoted to him in the Princeton University Press series that began in 1990 with *Brabms and His World*. The book, so its back cover blurb tells us, 'reexamines [sic] Chopin and his music in light of the cultural narratives formed during his lifetime'. It is in two parts: 1 Contemporary Cultural Contexts; 2 Musical and Pianistic Contexts. The 13 contributors are international Chopin scholars 'gathered here [to] demonstrate the ways in which Chopin responded to and was understood to exemplify these narratives, as an artist of his own time and one who transcended it'. As you might have guessed, it's American.

The opening essay is entitled 'Chopin's Oneiric Soundscapes and the Role of Dreams in Romantic Culture', a title not designed to entice the general reader but which sets the tone perfectly for what follows. The author, Halina Goldberg (one of the book's two editors), seeks in lifeless prose to attach to Chopin's Nocturnes a

relationship with the Romantics' interest in dreams, one that the composer never consciously envisaged. On the contrary, he actively discouraged any programmatic analysis of his compositions. Similarly, Anatole Leikin's chapter 'Chopin and the Gothic', David Kasunic's examination of the effect of Chopin's tuberculosis on his music and, to a lesser extent, Jeffrey Kallberg's 'Chopin and the Jews' all alight on particular characteristics in certain compositions in an attempt to ascribe various characteristics to the music of which the composer was unaware.

Rarely deployed words foster a sense of intellectual depth: 'oneiric', 'paradigmatic', 'voyance', 'noumenal' and 'scrim' all make an appearance and, in the following chapter, one I had never encountered previously: 'coryphaei'. This is in John Comber's translation of Józef Sikorski's 'Recollections of Chopin', the earliest extended essay on the composer's life and works, penned during the weeks following Chopin's death and published in December 1849. It appears here in English for the first time. Halina Goldberg's editorial footnotes are at least as interesting, including her assertion that Chopin's birth year was in fact 1809, not the usually accepted 1810.

None of this would remotely encourage the playing of or listening to the music itself. The book's second section rectifies this. Jonathan D Bellman (the book's other editor) asks 'why Chopin's music has always been so readily appreciated by listeners – far more even than that of still-popular contemporaries such as Robert Schumann and Franz Liszt. How to account for its immediate and continuing success?' It's a good question – and well answered. Other authors study other unique aspects of Chopin's musical language. Most valuable of all is John Rink's 'Chopin and Improvisation'. Here at last is an acknowledgement that the one constant source of Chopin's inspiration came not from abstract concepts or intellectual application of structures but from improvisation, that magical spring and



David Threasher immerses himself in a heavy-duty study of Mozart: *'Despite copious musical examples, much of the discussion really requires having a score of each work at hand'*

unteachable gift unknown to most academic professors of music.

There is also a useful chapter by Sandra P Rosenblum which compares and contrasts Chopin's performance style with his contemporaries as well as putting him in context, reminding us that for all his unique voice, Chopin was the product of his time and culture, and was influenced by others just as much as anyone else. He was not an isolated phenomenon who appeared from nowhere, a view enhanced, as Leon Botstein observes in his chapter entitled 'Chopin and the Consequences of Exile', 'by a shared European conceit that it was improbable that someone from Poland could attain greatness as a composer without some peculiar advantage'.

For a biography or a sequential discussion of Chopin's music or its performance, look elsewhere. If you want a series of disparate, unconnected essays on random aspects of Chopin's life and career, here it is. But I'm none too clear exactly who you are. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Mozart in Vienna

By Simon P Keefe

Cambridge University Press, HB, 689pp, £34.99
ISBN 978-1-316-33775-2



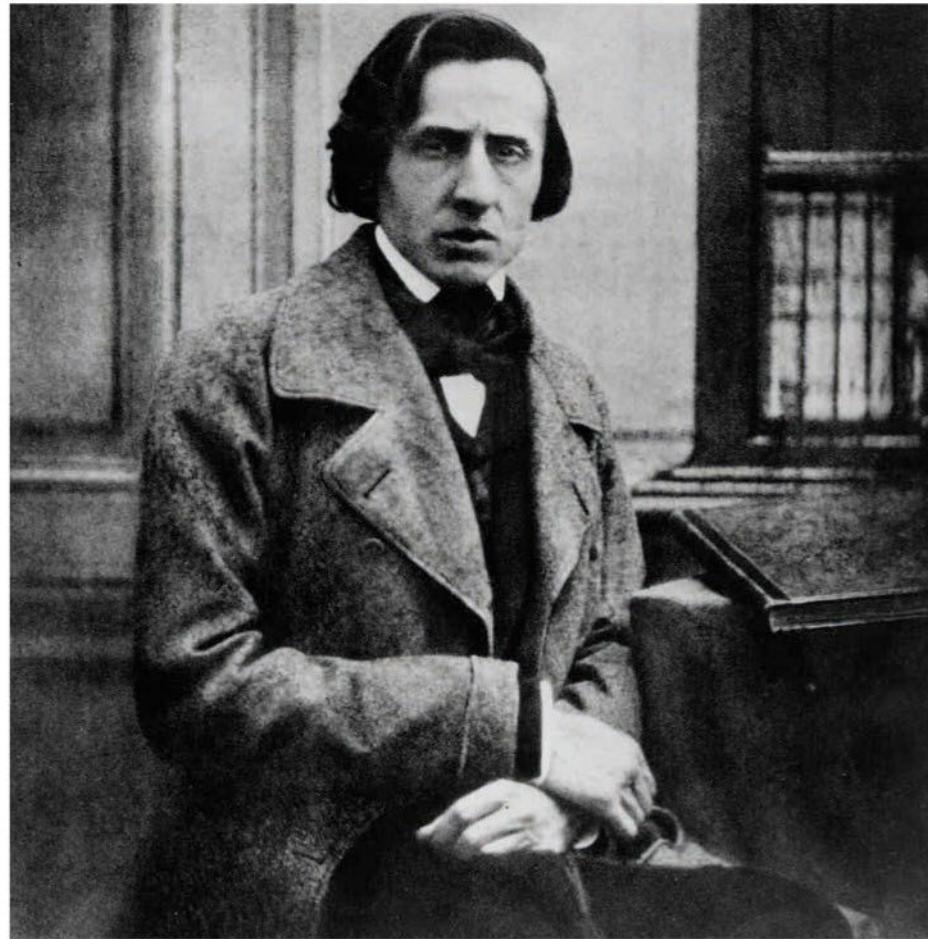
Simon Keefe expresses his hope that *Mozart in Vienna* will appeal 'not only to Mozart aficionados [and] musicologists' but also to general music lovers, the very audience towards whom *Gramophone* is aimed. That is a laudable wish – and his book is an enviable achievement – but at the same time there is much here that reaches a depth of academic involvement that might have the general reader flipping the pages in search of the next goblet of temporal biography, which

mainly occupies the beginnings and ends of sections.

To be sure, this is not a life-and-works biography of Mozart's Vienna decade in the manner of those by Volkmar Braunbehrens or HC Robbins Landon. Keefe's previous Mozartian work (and there is much of it, all of the highest quality) seeks through study of the earliest sources to divine the composer's motivations for writing what he did *in the way he did*, right down to the minutiae of articulation marks and dynamics. In so doing, he presents a biography of the mature composer less as a standard day-by-day account of his life but approaching him rather as a living, breathing performing musician; one who naturally had to pitch his music towards his audiences, whether or not he himself was the performer, and equally to his fellow musicians; one who had to deal with publishers, copyists, impresarios, bureaucrats and emperors; and one who, ultimately, had to balance exposure of himself as both composer and performer with the mundane but fundamental issues of managing his financial comings and goings as a freelance tradesman in the imperial capital with a wife and child to support.

Thus Keefe considers the period between the conception of a work and its final performance, taking into account Mozart's typical two stages of composition (a *particella* or short score containing the primary voices and motifs, which is then filled out in a second pass); and any subsequent period between its performance(s) and publication, when further alterations could be effected, based on the experience of hearing and/or playing the work in question. The particular abilities of Mozart's collaborators – primarily the singers in his operas but also colleagues such as the clarinettist Anton Stadler and the horn player Joseph Leutgeb – are considered as integral components in the conception of the works composed for them. So is built a valuable portrait of Mozart as situated in his milieu, not only amplifying our appreciation of his music but also illuminating the environment in which a working musician found himself in 1780s Vienna.

Keefe demonstrates his remarkably wide range of reading and calls as witness not only the correspondence of Mozart and his family but also a cornucopia of contemporary diaries and reports, early 19th-century writings on Mozart and a broad cross-section of current scholarship. Despite copious musical



Chopin's world: the latest book from the Bard Music Festival seeks to contextualise Chopin's music

examples, though, much of this discussion really requires having the score of each work at hand. Keefe admits as much and points out the availability online of the NMA – the 'official' complete Mozart edition – but that ties the reader of this hefty volume to the computer desk and renders the exercise somewhat unwieldy. Another aspect I missed, especially given Keefe's insistence on examining autographs and early copies or editions wherever possible, was any photographic reproduction of the sources, although, to be fair, one accepts that the use of such illustrative material would likely throw up any number of rights issues, as well as inflating the cost of the finished product.

Keefe discusses just about everything Mozart completed between 1781 and 1791, although he (deliberately) eschews consideration of the many sketches and fragmentary works that proliferate from this period, which, while they emerge in a haze of Mozartian mystery, nevertheless cast another light on the compositional process. (The leading examination of these tantalising pages, by Ulrich Konrad, has yet to appear in English translation.) All

the same, the two famous unfinished works that bookend the decade – the C minor Mass and Requiem – are granted their rightful place in the biography (and Keefe has written extensively elsewhere on the latter work); and the two unfulfilled opera projects of the Vienna period, *Zaide* and *L'oca del Cairo*, are given welcome exposure alongside the five last operas and, gratifyingly, a particularly fine reappraisal of *Die Entführung*. Also to be commended is his consideration of facets of Mozart's production such as the accompanied sonatas, Masonic music, Handel arrangements and other occasional works that often find themselves the subject of little more than lip service.

Production values are high and I spotted only the meanest of errors, although a couple of these involved the misspelling of standard aria titles, which should have been picked up (along with occasional purple patches of academe). Nevertheless, as a work of scholarship *Mozart in Vienna* is a handsome addition to Keefe's output as well as to the rich Mozartian literature, representing a welcome, if undeniably challenging, new look at some of the finest music ever created. **David Threasher**

The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

Jazz

Gregory Porter

Nat 'King' Cole & Me

Blue Note  6704314



It's turning out to be quite a month for Nat King Cole fans. In addition to the reissue of the monumental 8CD set of Cole's complete recordings with Nelson Riddle, we also have this similarly sumptuous album from Grammy-winning vocalist Gregory Porter. Produced, arranged and conducted by Vince Mendoza, Porter's first recording with full orchestra pays fulsome homage to one of his greatest musical touchstones. Beautifully recorded at London's AIR studios, it sees the singer wrap his fabulously rich baritone around everything from an über romantic 'Mona Lisa' to a deeply swinging 'Ballerina'. Whether

floating over the shimmering orchestral backdrop of 'Nature Boy' or employing his magnificent legato in 'Quizas, Quizas, Quizas', as with everything he does Porter sings straight from the heart with a timbral finesse, clarity of line and emotional honesty. The very first time Porter heard a Cole recording it was with strings, which somehow makes the glowing orchestrations of 'Nat 'King' Cole & Me' seem an even more fitting and heartfelt tribute. **Peter Quinn**

Zimpel/Ziołek

Zimpel/Ziołek

Instant Classic  CLASSIC 063CD



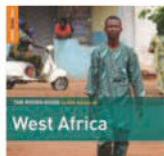
Polish composer and clarinet-player Waclaw Zimpel has been turning distant rumours into palpable rumbles with his

recent run of meditative Terry Riley/Jon Hassell-influenced releases for the decidedly eclectic Instant Classic imprint (check out Zimpel's solo disc, 'Lines', from 2016 to see what the fuss is about). For this duo set he buddies-up with fellow countryman Jakub Ziołek (formerly of impeccably improbable apocalyptic folk embroiderers Stara Rzeka and now half of the beautifully bucolic Alameda Duo) for a minimalist miasma of John Carpenter-like retro burbles and ecclesiastical drone, laced with the uplifting clarion of Zimpel's always bewitching pipes (awakening 'Fourth Molar' from its doozy soporifics) and Ziołek's becalming six-string arpeggios. The latter's occasional vocal glides across the shifting sea of tones like an origami clipper crossing a child's most fertile electronic dreams. Imagine 'Dark Star' remade by Hayao Miyazaki and here's your post-post-Milesian soundtrack. **Spencer Grady**

World Music

The Rough Guide to the Music of West Africa

World Music Network  RGNET1351CD



This latest update to the Rough Guide series of explorations of West African music serves as a useful reminder of some of the excellent releases from the Riverboat Records label. As a broad West African compilation, there is a strong bias towards the Francophone countries (Mali, Guinea and Senegal) rather than the Anglophone nations of Ghana and Nigeria. This means that there is plenty of the griot, or djeli, style of music, with its plaintive ngoni, kora and guitar backing, rather than the more jaunty guitar and horn sounds of highlife. Senegal's Nuru Kane plays his Gnawa-influenced music with a Moroccan gimbri (bass lute), while Guinean legend Mory Kanté excels on

the kora and balafon track 'Mama'. Malian guitarist Samba Touré is a protégé of Ali Farka Touré and, aside from Mory Kanté, is probably the most successful of the artists on offer here. The desolate desert electric blues guitar style is also in evidence on this compilation from powerful Touareg band Etran Finatawa. This is an excellent and varied selection. **Martin Sinnock**

Julie Fowlis

alterum

Machair Records  MACH008



In her own cool and exquisite way, Julie Fowlis is moving on. She became an international star by singing traditional songs in Scottish Gaelic. There have been occasional surprises in her career, from her Gaelic treatment of the Beatles' 'Blackbird'

to her English vocals for the *Brave* movie soundtrack. But now comes the first album of her own to include English-language songs, along with a traditional Galician song. Other new ingredients include duets with American country star Mary Chapin Carpenter and musical backing from a five-piece string section. She succeeds on all fronts, both because of the quality of her vocals and the way in which Gaelic song is still allowed to dominate. The English-language tracks are carefully chosen, with the slow and pained Anne Briggs ballad 'Go Your Way' followed by Archie Fisher's 'Windward Away', on which Carpenter's country-tinged harmonies make this sound like the result of the most perfect Celtic Connections pairing. The other duets are with the fine Irish Gaelic singer Muireann Nic Amhlaoibh. Fowlis already has a devoted following, and it's about to get even bigger. **Robin Denselow**

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MUSICAL CONNECTIONS

James Jolly takes us on two listening journeys inspired by Martin Luther and his teachings

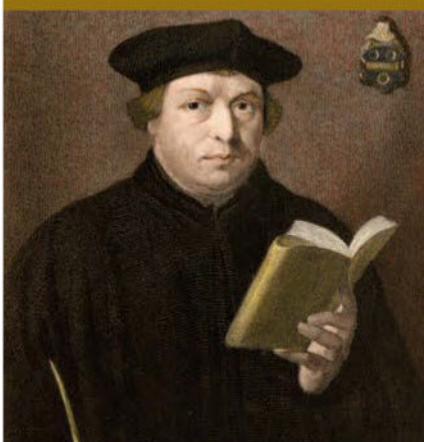
Influential 'Ein feste Burg'

Martin Luther wrote his great hymn 'Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott' ('A mighty fortress is our God') towards the end of the 1520s, marrying words and music with a surefooted sense of gravity, religious fervour and the ability to touch hearts with its directness and simplicity. The melody mostly moves in steps and shies away from extremes (both high and low): it's a good sing, easy to remember and stirs the spirit. It speaks of unshakeable faith, too, and it soon entered the German consciousness and started its own musical journey. The Choir of Clare College, Cambridge gives a rousing rendition on its recent Reformation programme, followed immediately by **JS Bach**'s Cantata No 80, a glorious creation that uses the great hymn as its chorale (which, in turn, was written for Reformation Day, October 31, 1724).

Mendelssohn's *Reformation* Symphony, written in 1830 to mark 500 years since the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession, employs Luther's theme in the fourth movement (the music switching from 4/4 to 2/4 to accommodate the hymn's metre). In a fine performance, like this recent one in John Eliot Gardiner's series for LSO Live, the way in which the chorale grows from its solo-flute introduction, adding in wind and brass as it goes, to its stately apotheosis for full orchestra is magnificent.

Meyerbeer's 1836 opera *Les Huguenots* culminates, in its blood-stained closing pages, with the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre, in 1572, in which thousands of (Protestant) Huguenots were murdered by the Catholics. To set the scene, Meyerbeer used Luther's chorale in the brief Prelude with which he replaced the longer overture he'd originally intended. Meanwhile, **Wagner**'s seldom-heard, and outrageously bombastic, *Kaisermarsch* ('Emperor's March') uses 'Ein feste Burg' to symbolise the victorious German troops who had recently defeated the French. Whereas **Alexander Glazunov**'s *Finnish Fantasy*, Op 88 (1909) – altogether more luminous in sound and spectacularly orchestrated (as well you might expect from this composer) – uses Luther's chorale to illustrate a national spirit.

Martin Luther's 'Ein feste Burg' was hugely influential and quoted by numerous composers, but his teachings were even more so and changed the course of music (see our feature on p14).



Martin Luther's influence on music was significant

Luther Ein feste Burg Clare College Ch / Ross

Harmonia Mundi

JS Bach Cantata No 80 Clare College Ch (see above)

Mendelssohn Symphony No 5

LSO / Gardiner LSO Live

Meyerbeer Les Huguenots - Prelude

New Philh / Bonyngde Decca

Wagner Kaisermarsch LSO / Janowski

Warner Classics

Glazunov Finnish Fantasy

Moscow SO / Golovschin Naxos

Modern psalm settings

Perhaps the most far-reaching contribution to Christianity made by Luther was his translation, in the 1520s and '30s, into German of the Bible. It led to translations in numerous other languages (William Tyndale's English version was started in 1525). Here are some 20th-century settings of (mainly) psalms in their composer's own languages. **Alexander Zemlinsky**'s setting of Psalm 83, from 1900, is a dramatic affair for soloists, choir and orchestra, and sets the text – which seems to call for the destruction of one's enemies – with terrific spirit. **Vaughan Williams**'s 1921 take on Psalm 90, *Lord, thou hast been our refuge*, is a virtuoso lamination of two different melodies; into RVW's own setting is woven *O God our help in ages past*, Isaac Watts's hymn to the tune of St Anne which paraphrases the

same psalm. It's a work of colossal power, done with terrific skill, and the Choir of Jesus College, Cambridge gives a magnificent performance. **Charles Ives** set quite a few psalms and he, too, alighted on Psalm 90 – albeit in a slightly different translation – for another atmospheric setting. *Lord, thou has been our dwelling place* employs organ, bells and mixed choir to powerful effect; tonal and stately, it builds magnificently to its serene conclusion. **Carl Nielsen** wrote his *14 Hymns and Sacred Songs* in 1918 for solo voice and piano (or organ). Set in Danish, the purpose – of which Luther would have heartily approved – was to create music that could be sung in people's homes by normal folk in their own tongue. The hymns' power rests in their simplicity and directness, and when performed in that same spirit they are enormously effective (they're still sung in Danish houses today). **Judith Bingham** made her 1993 setting of Psalm 139, *The darkness is no darkness* to precede Isaiah 26, via SS Wesley, for choir and organ. The harmonic potential of the Wesley provided the inspiration for Bingham's first section which acts a kind of doorway into an older but no less moving world. And **Cheryl Frances-Hoad**'s setting of the *Nunc dimittis* uses an English translation which, coupled with the 'innocence' of solo soprano voices, makes for a powerful listen – especially given the unbridled emotionalism of the musical language.

Zemlinsky Psalm 83 RCOA / Chailly Decca

Vaughan Williams Lord, thou hast been our refuge Jesus College, Cambridge / Williams Signum

Ives Psalm 90 SWR Vokalensemble Stuttgart / Creed Hänsler Classic

Nielsen Hymns and Sacred Songs

T Nielsen bar Bryndorf org Dacapo

Bingham The darkness is no darkness

BBC Symphony Chorus / Jackson Naxos

Frances-Hoad Nunc dimittis Choir of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge Champs Hill



To explore these playlists via a streaming service, or to create your own, we suggest qobuz.com. You can listen to these particular playlists at gramophone.co.uk/playlists

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings

The Amadeus at 70

For 40 years, the London-based quartet never changed personnel – their discography for DG returns complete

From the 1950s through to the 1980s DG's **Amadeus Quartet** legacy spells one quality above all: class. Those handsome LPs, invariably adorned either with a distinctive painting or a stylish portrait of the 'sublime four' themselves, are reproduced in miniature, enveloping each of the 70 CDs.

Combative and mischievous (sample the amusing last track on the bonus disc), but above all affectingly musical, the Amadeus Quartet, whose personnel remained unchanged for its duration (1947–87), maintained a recognisable playing style that contrasted with other groups of the day (quartets such as the Budapest, Juilliard, Guarneri and Italian), their pooled tone dulcet yet robust, their approach developing with the years so that when you compare, say, their three versions of Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* Quartet (1953, 1959, 1981), you'll note how the earliest finale is driven almost to the point of violence, the middle recording combines precision with supple expressiveness and the last recording witnesses a new-found mellowness. Yes, you'll easily recognise the ensemble you're listening to, but you'll also note, no doubt with interest as well as appreciation, a palpable maturing process.

And there's the question of repeats. Take Mozart's *Hunt* Quartet – four recordings this time, 1951, 1956 (a first release on CD), 1963, 1982 – where, apart from the perceptive contrasts in shifts, tempo relations, dynamics, emphases, nuancing and so on, the first and last recordings include the first-movement exposition repeat, but the middle two don't. Also, in the 1982 version, there's the Amadeus's exquisite playing of the two high chords that precede the repeat's return. There's a similar situation with the G minor String Quintet, K516: all six quintets are included – three versions of this particular work, from 1951, 1957 and 1969 respectively. Again, the middle version is the culprit with no first-movement repeat,

whereas in the 1951 recording, at the *Adagio* start of the finale, Martin Lovett's cello is virtually inaudible, which is a great shame given that this is one of the great dialoguing moments in Mozart's chamber-music output. Having said that, in the same performance the quartet's first full *forte* attack is exceedingly dramatic.

There are of course many other cases where you'll be able to compare like with like, Beethoven's 'late' quartets, for example, where the recordings from the 1970s and early '80s (Opp 127, 131 and 132 are again first CD releases) gain in flexibility where they lose, albeit marginally, in visceral attack (in comparison with the more familiar versions from the early 1960s). Even the Amadeus's last recording, made for Decca in 1987 and coupling the *Harp* and Third *Razumovsky* Quartets, promotes so much love of the music, especially in Op 59 No 3's central movement where Norbert Brainin's solo violin suggests a gentle but profound manner of cantillation.

Haydn provides another series of highlights, with Opp 54, 64, 71, 74, 76 and 77, many featuring alternative recordings. Were I to recommend a prime sampling of the Amadeus's mature style it would be via their 1978 recordings of Op 74, though it's fascinating to compare the finale of *The Rider* with its 1957 predecessor. But for many the most pressing question will be what's new, and what's new to CD.

There's a first release of the 35th anniversary recital (1983), the repertoire, Beethoven's *Razumovsky* No 3, Haydn's *Fifths* Quartet and Britten's Third Quartet, a work that was dedicated to them (their 1978 commercial recording of the work is needless to say also included). And there's Sir Ernest MacMillan, Canada's only musical Knight who is widely regarded as being that nation's pre-eminent musician from the 1920s through to the 1950s. It was in the 1960s that the Amadeus made

a little-known recording of MacMillan's chamber music, featuring the C minor String Quartet and the *Two Sketches on French Canadian Airs*. This coupling receives its first official CD release. The set's earliest featured recording (1949) is of Priaulx Rainier's String Quartet, another first CD release, as is Peter Racine Fricker's Second Quartet, an interesting 1963 session where the Quartet projects an uncharacteristically intense, lean-limbed tone. In fact if I hadn't known it was the Amadeus playing, I'd never have guessed. Another CD premiere gathers together Schubert's Quartets Nos 12, 13 and 15 in recordings that stretch from 1959 to 1966, whereas Mozart's Piano Quartets with Walter Klien, also never previously released on CD, date from 1981. Letting down their hair, there's the slow movement from Beethoven's Op 18 No 5 where the Quartet members (renamed the 'Gottlieb Quartet') swap instruments and struggle with the notes, often commenting as they go along. It's hilarious, if not exactly a comfortable, 'listen'.

And the rest? Some wonderful Brahms, as well as Bridge, Britten, Bruckner, Dvořák, Hoffstetter, Mendelssohn, Smetana, Tchaikovsky and Verdi. Joys galore, invariably captured in superb sound and sturdily presented in a weighty red square box with essays by Martin Lovett and Daniel Snowman. Add Audité's highly desirable series of Berlin RIAS Amadeus broadcasts (reviewed in previous instalments of 'Replay') and you have a quartet legacy that, as far as the post-war period is concerned, would be difficult to equal let alone surpass. In a word, magnificent.

THE RECORDING



Amadeus Quartet The Complete Recordings on Deutsche Grammophon DG (70 discs) 479 7589



The Amadeus Quartet's 70-CD celebratory album includes their entire catalogue for Deutsche Grammophon

More classic Haydn

The Belgian **Pro Arte Quartet**, who formed in 1912/13, cut their incomparable Haydn discs between 1931 and 1938. Some years ago Testament spread the whole series across two sets of CDs and now Warner Classics obliges with the same recordings packed into a single bargain box. The first thing to say is that the transfers are first-rate, often without as much as a hint of shellac surface noise, which means that the sparkling, witty edge of the Pro Arte's playing is captured in something resembling vintage 'high fidelity'. Take the finale of the G minor Quartet Op 74 No 3, *The Rider*, played at a lightning tempo, its deftness, accuracy intonation-wise and astonishing range of dynamics, from *ppp* to *ff*, all reported with amazing faithfulness, quite an achievement given the year, 1931. Or there are the richly infused harmonies of Op 54 No 2's finale, the *adagio* opening specifically, which demonstrate the quartet's ability to achieve a perfect tonal blend, at once both warm and crystal clear. And what a contrast with the quicksilver *presto* that follows. Both Op 77 quartets are included, the first opening to a jaunty *Allegro moderato*. The repeat is played and the feel of a gentle 'jog trot', absolutely right. I was glad to see four of the six Op 20 quartets here, three quartets from Op 33 though only two from Op 76. Still, there are 25 quartets to relish and the playing consistently engaging, especially the portamento so typical of a performing style that will predate many who will be reading this survey. My advice is to listen, learn and, above all, enjoy.

PHOTOGRAPHY: LOTHAR WINKLER/DG

THE RECORDING



Haydn Pro Arte Quartet
Warner Classics mono
S 7 9029 58691-8

Walter Barylli as soloist

In the December 2016 'Replay' I covered Scribendum's excellent 22-CD survey of the Barylli Quartet (SC805). Its leader, **Walter Barylli** (now aged 96), was a student at the Vienna Music Academy who gave his first public performance as a soloist in Munich, and made his first recordings in Berlin in 1936 when he was in his mid-teens. Those recordings or at least a selection of them are included in this set, sweet-toned performances played in a style that fits the period, the sound passable but no more than that. As to the rest, the venues are set in Vienna and most recordings emanate from Barylli's Westminster discography, a selection of Mozart violin sonatas with Paul Badura-Skoda conforming to a warmly stylish interpretative template (11 works in all are included). Another highlight is 'L'amerò, sarò costante' from *Il Re Pastore* with Hilde Gueden while Mozart's great *Sinfonia concertante* in E flat, K364, finds Barylli in duet with viola player Paul Doktor, the conductor Felix Prohaska, a fresh, expressive performance. By contrast Bach's A minor and E major Violin Concertos under the leisurely baton of Hermann Scherchen, although demonstrably musical in phrasing and execution, won't please readers whose tastes veer more in the

direction of lighter, swifter and more attenuated period-instrument productions. Transfers are generally good, save for some insufficient gaps between items and the fact that the Berlin 78s suffer heavy surface noise as well as occasional pitch problems. Recommended all the same.

THE RECORDING



The Art of Walter Barylli
Scribendum mono
S 5 SC806

Robert Casadesus's art

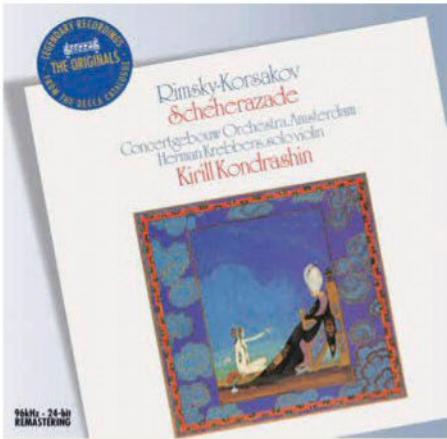
Catch-up time now and a Scribendum set devoted to the French pianist and composer **Robert Casadesus**, the 'other' 1950s classical pianist, besides Rudolf Serkin, on CBS/Sony's books. I say 'classical' because both pianists made a distinguished series of Mozart concerto recordings but while Sony have given us all of Serkin's recordings, duplications included, Scribendum take the economic route and offer just one version per work which means, for example, the stereo rather than the mono cycle of Beethoven violin sonatas with Zino Francescatti, all fire and ice, though both versions of Mozart's Double Piano Concerto are included. Still, there are miracles aplenty, not least Schumann's *Dichterliebe* eloquently sung by Pierre Bernac, and the live version of Brahms's Second Piano Concerto with Carl Schuricht that I mentioned in this column not too long ago, rugged, assertive playing, the sort that rightfully places this greatest of all Romantic piano concertos on the highest pedestal. Casadesus's solo Ravel is rightly celebrated though I prefer his Debussy, also included (the *Préludes* especially memorable). Recordings with Mme Casadesus (Gaby) include works by Fauré, Schubert, Mozart, Bartók and Casadesus himself. And among the other works featuring Francescatti are the three Brahms violin sonatas. My own favourite items include sensitively sculpted performances of Bach, Rameau and Scarlatti, Casadesus as ever alert, intelligent, stylish, and technically adroit. The sound is for the most part crisp and clear (much of the set is in stereo). **G**

THE RECORDING



The Art of Robert Casadesus
Scribendum
M (30 discs) SC506

Classics RECONSIDERED



Rimsky-Korsakov

Sheherazade

Herman Krebbers vn Concertgebouw Orchestra / Kirill Kondrashin

Decca

A fascinating combination for this new *Sheherazade*: a great orchestra from Northern Europe led by a famous violin soloist whose style is the antithesis of sensuous romanticism and whose portrayal of the seductive storyteller is essentially gentle, even introvert; and a Russian conductor noted for the vigour and slavic intensity of his approach to music from his



Rob Cowan and Andrew Achenbach
discuss the pros and cons of Kondrashin's recording of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sheherazade*



homeland. After the violin's opening dialogue Kondrashin is careful to pick up the narrative not too forcefully but he builds towards the movement's climax with a splendid architectural sweep. The adrenalin runs freely, but the orchestral personality prevents any feeling of aggressiveness and the sound is as richly spacious as it is brilliant. The second movement is no less vibrant, its middle section excitingly fast, but never sounding hurried. In the brass fanfares I did not much care for the rather lazy phrasing of the trombone (contrasted with the tight, crisply rhythmic trumpet)

but this is a small point; the woodwind solos here as in the slow movement are colourfully evocative. The phrasing of the famous slow movement melody by the strings is elegant and gracious, quite in keeping with this *Sheherazade*'s personality. The finale is another matter. Without taking unusually fast tempi Kondrashin sweeps the listener away with a reading of irresistibly impulsive excitement reaching a huge climax at the moment of the shipwreck. He is helped by the marvellous recording, which has sparkle, weight and exactly the right resonance. **Ivan March (11/80)**

Rob Cowan Although Rimsky-Korsakov had the ambience of *One Thousand and One Nights* in mind when he composed *Sheherazade*, the movement titles offer the merest guide to his musical intentions. In fact, at one point he even thought of dispensing with them altogether. Ivan March is right on track when he notes how Kondrashin is careful not to force the opening narrative. The *Allegro non troppo* 'first theme' is, after all, marked *piano*. Kondrashin is bang on target with the composer's metronome, only deviating as the sea swell occasionally changes current, and then the effect is subtle. Herman Krebbers, a player for soloistic skills, is a sweet enough *Sheherazade* to seduce but reserved enough so that she holds her cards close to her chest. And there's the magnificent orchestra, distinguished in every department, and mightily impressive in its tonal splendour. Of course, one inevitably harbours memories of notable soloists on previous recordings, bassoonist Gwydion Brooke for Beecham, for example, playfully cavorting at the start of 'The Story of the Kalender Prince' – 'you could almost smell the camel dung', as

clarinettist Basil Tchaikov once put it to me – but Kondrashin and his team never fall short for overall excellence.

Andrew Achenbach It's truly a *Sheherazade* for the ages, a performance of entrancing poise, strength of character and majestic sweep, with a generous quotient of fresh-faced ardour (what disarming tenderness the Amsterdam strings bring to their gorgeous cantilena in 'The Young Prince and the Young Princess' – fascinatingly different from, say, Reiner's altogether more headily sensual, languorous treatment in his 1960 Chicago recording) and giddy excitement (the finale's 'Festival at Baghdad' builds up a thrilling head of steam, without any loss of control or the merest hint of scramble). Not only does Kondrashin obtain orchestral playing of the highest quality (the Concertgebouw Orchestra's legendary concertmaster Krebbers must surely be among the most sheerly beguiling storytellers on disc), but also his cannily paced and thrillingly cogent conception seems to me to chime precisely with Rimsky-Korsakov's own advice for those lucky souls encountering the work for

the first time: 'Listen to *Sheherazade* symphonically and your imagination will be set free to roam where it will.'

RC You mention Reiner, and I'd second your enthusiasm for his brilliantly recorded Chicago classic. One of the most compelling episodes – and a useful point for comparison – is the passage in the 'Kalender Prince' where the second trombone is answered by the muted principal trumpet. Go to 3'30" on either version and beyond a fierce *Allegro molto* (equally assertive on both recordings) Reiner's second trombone opts for a quicker tempo than Kondrashin's. I prefer it, but then the muted response sounds more sinister under Kondrashin. He's your man for tonal lustre, with distinct dynamic contrasts, whereas Reiner, ever the painstaking jeweller in sound, is stronger on minutiae. Then again, his virtuoso ensemble is easily the equal of the Concertgebouw Orchestra; he achieves maximum intensity at, say, around 6'27" into the fourth movement, during 'The Shipwreck', where the high woodwind are drilled down to the last demisemiquaver. And while Kondrashin manages a parallel



Kirill Kondrashin succeeds in coaxing orchestral playing 'of the highest quality' from his Concertgebouw forces

effect at a similar tempo, his performance doesn't quite take fire in the same way.

AA By their side, the vintage LSO/Monteux version (which I grew up with) can seem more than a little rough around the edges – but how spontaneous and vital it still sounds! The Frenchman is also one of a select few – Ansermet (in his early-stereo Paris Conservatoire account from 1954) and van Beinum included – who profitably heed Rimsky-Korsakov's marking of *Andantino quasi allegretto* for the third movement's heaven-sent melody. Like Beecham (and the RPO) before him, Kondrashin activates the goosebumps at a fractionally more spacious tempo, whereas I can't help feeling that the masterful Reiner comes dangerously close to gilding the lily. I love, too, the muscle and articulacy of Kondrashin's strings in the magnificent opening seascape (the violins' *non legato* phrases really tell), though no one quite matches Beecham's ability here to conjure the spray and tang, that sense of eager anticipation when setting out on an adventure. Similarly, it's Beecham who brings a touch greater caprice, narrative flair and swagger to 'The Story of the Kalender Prince'; just marvel at the delicacy and hush he distils for the *poco meno mosso* around 10'21", where the solo flute sweetly sings

against a backdrop of harp and *tremolando* violins – pure magic!

RC Yes, agreed. But then that same passage under Kondrashin (10'31") is equally translucent and even better recorded. As for Ansermet (I incline more towards his Suisse Romande version, at 9'27"), interestingly, he keeps the tempo fluid here, the effect more a reflection on what's gone before than indulging the moment for its own sake. I'm glad you cite him because earlier on in the same movement, the passage where the second trombone is answered by the muted trumpet, the latter is more prominent than the former – which is the opposite of the effect achieved by Kondrashin (an anomaly of recorded balance, perhaps?). Also, Ansermet's Suisse Romande trombone is more animated. Where I think Ansermet falls from grace a little and Kondrashin picks up a few brownie points is in the finale, where the Concertgebouw Orchestra's quicksilver strings – light as thistledown, but kept tense as the moment dictates – win out. Yes, there are others who score high in that same passage, but Kondrashin is among the best proportioned in terms of balance.

AA By the way, I do think it's worth acknowledging the fabulous contribution of

the Philips recording team supervised by Volker Straus (the man also responsible for Haitink's remarkable Debussy *Nocturnes/Jeux* coupling from exactly the same period). Certainly, the finale's climactic shipwreck has a physical impact that is astonishing, and the whole production still sounds utterly splendid – it's small wonder that *Gramophone*'s 'Sounds in Retrospect' panel put it in their Quarter's Choice for June 1981, and that Lionel Salter hailed it as a demonstration vehicle for the new medium of Compact Disc in the March 1983 issue. (I remember shelling out for the full-price CD and have never regretted it.)

RC You're right. It's so easy to forget the technical teams that help make these classic recordings sound as distinctive as they are. Straus's productions for Philips do indeed achieve a degree of amplitude that's sensitive to both ends of the dynamic spectrum, so different from the unrelentingly aggressive recordings that Kondrashin made in Moscow for Melodiya. Is there a Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra *Sheherazade*, I wonder? Then again, we do have burningly intense Soviet recordings of the piece from Golovanov (with David Oistrakh a Marilyn Monroe among storytellers) and Svetlanov. Interesting, the concept of a 'demonstration' CD, this being the ideal carrier for the new medium, where the orchestra could be heard both whispering and thundering at full cry. But these are visceral issues that tend to mask the subtler aspects of interpretation, which is why when I return to this classic nowadays I'm more likely to assess it as an interpretation pure and simple than as a sonic blockbuster.

AA To be fair to Lionel, he did also make specific mention of 'Kondrashin's skill in pacing and shaping movements as a whole, relating the diverse tempos and building up tension and dynamics by careful control so as to create climaxes of thrilling intensity and power' – a spot-on assessment if ever I read one. Goodness, we haven't even mentioned the famous versions by Kletzki (with the Philharmonia Orchestra), Stokowski (in matters of text always a law unto himself, and there are various versions to choose from) or Ozawa (what ravishing string timbre he draws from Joseph Silverstein and his Boston colleagues in his fine 1977 DG recording). To be honest, there's something about the Beecham – a touch of alchemy, even genius – that stops me in my tracks every time. As for the Kondrashin, it's right up there with the all-time greats; indeed, I can't think of a recorded performance since that is its superior, let alone its equal. **G**

THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...

Faust in music

In his survey, **Hugo Shirley** foregoes song settings of poems from Goethe's play in favour of broader dramatic and symphonic settings composed in response to one of Western literature's most important figures

The importance of Faust as a literary figure is difficult to overestimate, as is the importance specifically of Goethe's *Faust* in European culture of the last two centuries. The story of the scholar who strikes a deal with the Devil has its roots far back in literary history, but Goethe raised material that was often treated comically on to a new plane of seriousness, as, arguably, did Mozart and Da Ponte with the story of Don Juan.

Faust spanned more than half a century of Goethe's life: he worked on the earliest version, the so-called *Urfraust*, in the 1770s; the completed *Faust* consists of two parts, published in 1808 and 1832 respectively.

Faust I offers a relatively taut treatment of Faust's pact with Mephistopheles and tragic seduction of Margarete (or Gretchen). The freewheeling *Faust II*, often deemed unstageable, is a more elaborate exploration of Goethe's own personal beliefs and philosophy, taking the reader on an imaginative tour through time and space and culminating with the character's richly allegorical redemption.

For Goethe, Faust embodied eternal striving, an awareness of humanity's inability to master knowledge and the world: he is scientist, thinker and artist. The tragic consequences of this drive were explored by Thomas Mann in his novel *Doktor Faustus*

(1947), where the story became an allegory for musical creativity specifically, the shady pact leading the protagonist to discover 12-note serialism – much to the chagrin, in real life, of the system's actual 'inventor', Schoenberg.

Goethe reportedly believed that setting his play to music was impossible. Composers of many different nationalities and aesthetic outlooks have nevertheless tried. For some, it's an excuse for grand opera excess, an opportunity to give the devil some of the best tunes. For others, however, Faust was a lifelong obsession, a character central to their own struggles with creativity and strivings for artistic fulfilment. 



Faust is tempted by Mephistopheles in a print by Geoffroy. Faust's story, and particularly Goethe's telling of it, has been the source of inspiration for many great composers



Spohr
Faust
Michael Vier *bar* Eelco von
Jordis *bar* Diane Jennings *sop*
William Pugh *ten* et al;

Bielefeld Op Chor; Bielefeld PO / Geoffrey Moull
CPO (8/94)

Based on earlier sources rather than Goethe, Spohr's *Faust* skims the surface of the material and sets it to easy-going melodic music that sounds incongruous today. It was a hit in the early 19th century, though, and an important work in both operatic history and the history of *Faust* in opera. Weber conducted the premiere of the first version (1816), which Spohr expanded for this 1852 revision.



Berlioz
La damnation de Faust
Thomas Moser *ten* José van
Dam *bar* Frédéric Caton *bass*
Susan Graham *sop*

Lyon Op Chor and Orch / Kent Nagano
Erato (11/95)

Nearly 20 years elapsed between Berlioz first discovering *Faust* and completing his *légende dramatique* based upon Goethe's work in 1846. A masterpiece whose fortunes have nevertheless been held back by its genre-crossing designation, *La damnation de Faust* shows Berlioz at his most ambitious, imaginative and inspired.



Schumann
Szenen aus Goethes Faust
Christiane Karg *sop*
Bernada Fink *mezzo* Christian
Gerhaier *bar* et al; Bavarian
Rad Sym Chor and Orch / Daniel Harding

BR Klassik (12/14)

It is no surprise that Schumann should have been a great admirer of both parts of Goethe's *Faust*, but he quickly changed early plans to produce an opera based on the work to favour an oratorio. The result is in three parts, composed separately and taking episodes from both *Faust I* and *Faust II*. Despite its fragmented structure, it adds up to one of Schumann's finest works.



Boito
Mefistofele
Norman Treigle *bass* Plácido
Domingo *ten* Montserrat
Caballé *sop* et al; Wandsworth

Sch Boys' Ch; Ambrosian Chor; LSO / Julius Rudel
Warner Classics (6/74)

Though best known as a librettist, Boito was also a fine composer. *Mefistofele* is hugely ambitious, attempting to condense both parts of Goethe's play into an evening's opera. So here, Faust gets to witness Walpurgis night and fall in love with not just Margherita but also Helen of Troy. Highlights include Margherita's 'L'altra notte' and the grandly stirring prologue (in Heaven) and epilogue.



Schubert
Szene aus Faust, D126
Marie McLaughlin *sop*
Thomas Hampson *bar* New
Company; Graham Johnson *pf*
Hyperion (4/92)

Composed just weeks after his more famous *Faust* masterpiece 'Gretchen am Spinnrade', this scene for Gretchen, Mephistopheles (or 'Böser Geist', as the score has it) and chorus is hardly less remarkable: a fully fledged quasi-operatic scene featuring baldly naturalistic word-setting, whose economy and brevity seem only to add to its power. It offers a glimpse of an operatic potential that, alas, Schubert never managed to fulfil.



Liszt
A Faust Symphony
Kenneth Riegel *ten*
Tanglewood Festival Chorus,
Boston SO / Leonard Bernstein
DG (4/78)

In 1848 Liszt moved to Weimar, Goethe's home for half a century. In 1849 he conducted the premiere there of Schumann's *Szenen aus Goethes Faust*; five years later he composed the first version of his own *Faust Symphony*. Essentially three character portraits, on Faust (with whom Liszt strongly identified), Gretchen and Mephistopheles, the piece culminates in a grand chorus with tenor, which was added in 1857.



Gounod
Faust
Nicolai Gedda *ten*
Boris Christoff *bass*
Victoria de los Ángeles *sop* et al;

Paris Op Chor and Orch / André Cluytens
Warner Classics (1/60)

Long referred to as *Margarete* in German-speaking countries (to distance it from Goethe), this opera (premiered in Paris, 1859) cherry-picked elements from the drama and tacked on a piously Catholic redemption in order to appeal to a Second Empire audience. Full of memorable arias and ensembles, it was a hit, and although it fell out of fashion in the 20th century, it is well represented on disc.



Mahler
Symphony No 8
Sols; Vienna State Op Chor;
Vienna Singverein; Vienna Boys'
Ch; Chicago SO / Georg Solti
Decca (10/72)

Possibly the grandest of all *Faust* settings, the second half of the *Symphony of a Thousand* sets just the final scene of Goethe's *Faust II*, presented as a humanist counterbalance to the overtly Christian setting of the first half. For vast forces, sweepingly lyrical and heartfelt, it introduces the scene's many allegorical characters vividly before culminating with the Chorus *Mysticus* – one of Mahler's most overwhelming symphonic finales.



L Boulanger
Faust et Hélène
Lynne Dawson *sop*
Bonaventura Bottone *ten*
Jason Howard *bass*

BBC Philharmonic / Yan Pascal Tortelier
Chandos (9/99)

With this piece, setting a text only vaguely based on Goethe, the 19-year-old Lili Boulanger became in 1913 the first woman to win the Prix de Rome for music – she was dead just five years later. She goes well beyond Eugène Adenis's desultory words to create something that's as much a sophisticated tone poem as a 'lyric scene', a work that conjures up the subject's broader history.

Busoni

Doktor Faust Dietrich Henschel *bar* Kim Begley *ten* et al; Lyon Op Chor and Orch / Kent Nagano
Warner Classics (11/99)

Perhaps of all treatments of the *Faust* subject in music, Busoni's opera is the one that comes closest to the seriousness and philosophical richness of Goethe's, even if it fuses elements of that version with older German sources and contemporaneous influences. First mooted as early as 1906 and left unfinished at Busoni's

death in 1924 (it was completed by Philipp Jarnach), it encapsulates much of the composer's own philosophy, his concerns about the role and obligations of the artist and the dilemmas of modernity. Kent Nagano's recording, with Dietrich Henschel in the title-role, also includes Antony Beaumont's new completion.

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*

Mark Pullinger's sweet tooth remains as potent as ever, even after repeated listenings of the ultimate Christmas ballet – indeed, his survey of recordings of the complete work brings to light many decent versions

Christmas is difficult to imagine without *The Nutcracker*. It's an integral part of the festive season, a staple of any ballet company's repertoire and the first exposure to classical ballet for thousands of children every year. This month marks the 125th anniversary of the piece, premiered on December 18, 1892, when it was paired with another new Tchaikovsky work, his opera *Iolanta*. Yet what is now the quintessential Christmas ballet didn't receive the most auspicious of beginnings. One dance critic dismissed *The Nutcracker* as 'child's prattle', the libretto described as 'lopsided' and straying too far from ETA Hoffmann's tale *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* (a seriously dark story), on which the work was based.

It's ironic that *Iolanta*, which was the better-received work of the evening, struggled to hold a place in the repertory, although in recent years productions by Mariusz Treliński and Peter Sellars have started to restore its reputation. *Iolanta* and *The Nutcracker* have rarely been paired, though. Opera North marked the centenary by performing the opera alongside Matthew Bourne's *Nutcracker!*. Last year, Dmitri Tcherniakov – *enfant terrible* of the opera world – directed a double bill for Paris Opera, a mismatch featuring a moving *Iolanta* but a *Nutcracker* hobbled by a weird directorial concept involving a meteorite crashing into Marie's birthday party! I very much doubt it will ever be revived.

The Nutcracker was commissioned by Ivan Vsevolozhsky, director of the Imperial Theatres in Russia, after the success of *The Sleeping Beauty* in 1890. Once again, Marius Petipa was to be the choreographer (though Lev Ivanov later took over), and for the

subject, he and Tchaikovsky settled on Hoffmann's story – or at least its adaptation by Alexandre Dumas *père* (*Histoire d'un casse-noisette*), which softens the edges and dusts them in clouds of icing sugar.

On Christmas Eve, Marie – or Clara, as she becomes in most versions – is given a nutcracker by her godfather, the mysterious Drosselmeyer. After everyone has gone to bed, her toys come alive, the nutcracker engaged in furious battle with a seven-headed mouse king, which Clara defeats with a deft slap from her slipper. As a reward, she is whisked away to the Kingdom of Sweets, where she is welcomed by the Sugar Plum Fairy and treated to a celebration of sweets from around the world. Tchaikovsky's score – particularly the divertissement – is instantly familiar. Everyone knows the Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy, with its dainty celesta solo, the plucky March and the Dance of the Mirlitons (the last familiar to anyone of a certain age from an advertising jingle for Cadbury's Fruit & Nut!).

I first became aware of the music via the Disney animated film *Fantasia* (1940), entranced by its waddling mushrooms in the Chinese Dance, while thistles are among the flowers essaying the Trepak. The very first classical LP that I was given featured the *Nutcracker* Suite performed by the Vienna Philharmonic under Herbert von Karajan and it inspired a love for Tchaikovsky's music which has continued unabated ever since. For this survey, though, I'm only considering recordings of the complete ballet – which rules out not only Karajan, but any recording by the Vienna Philharmonic at all! The field is still as rich as plum pudding, though,



with a remarkable number of recordings emanating from London orchestras and a good sprinkling from Russia.

MUSICAL HIGHLIGHTS AND KEY TESTS

All the recordings in the selected discography (with a single exception) deliver a decent *Nutcracker*. Most handle the music of the divertissement pretty well; if anything comes a cropper, it tends to be the Arabian Dance – occasionally too fast, often too slow. The Waltz of the Flowers is possibly the greatest waltz ever written (may my dearest Austrian friends forgive me!) and provides orchestras (and conductors) with a sterner test. Apart from the numbers familiar from the suite though, there are three big tests my ideal



A scene from the 1892 Nutcracker premiere at the Mariinsky

Nutcracker has to pass: the transformation scene, where Drosselmeyer casts his spell and the Christmas tree begins to grow; the Pine Forest in Winter scene, where the Nutcracker leads Clara off through the snow; and the grand *pas de deux* for the Sugar Plum Fairy and her cavalier, where Tchaikovsky spins magic from a simple descending G major scale.

A TRIO OF RECORDINGS FROM DORATI

Hungarian conductor **Antal Dorati** was the first to record *The Nutcracker* complete, on an early Mercury set in mono with the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra in 1953. It's hard to comprehend that Tchaikovsky's music beyond the suite wouldn't have been very familiar at the time, causing

Trevor Harvey (in the February 1955 issue of *Gramophone*) to enthuse about 'a whole series of enchanting things that we never hear'. Reedy woodwind characterise a wiry orchestral sound. The score rattles along in Dorati's hands, the Waltz of the Flowers harried along quickly at an undanceable pace. Dorati uses the University of Minnesota Singers for the Waltz of the Snowflakes. He is not the only conductor to prefer a ladies' choir to children, and the decision to act on this wouldn't quite put a recording out of the running, but the singers here sound particularly matronly.

I much prefer Dorati's 1962 second recording (also on Mercury, but in vivid stereo), with the London Symphony

Orchestra on splendid form, attacking the score with relish.

Dorati is often restless, turning in an exciting battle scene, while the transformation of the Christmas tree is really thrilling. Another adult choir – the London Symphony Chorus – is less problematic. The *Divertissement* zings and the closely miked harp and swooning strings sweep the *pas de deux* along passionately. The celesta – which Tchaikovsky discovered in Paris and was desperate to keep 'under wraps' in Russia lest someone like Rimsky-Korsakov should use it ahead of him – has a wonderful 'music box' quality here, tinkling merrily the Sugar Plum Fairy's giddy coda.

On his third recording (1975), with the Concertgebouw Orchestra, Dorati is a little less hectic and he uses a boys' choir for the Waltz of the Snowflakes. Overall, though, the woodwind playing isn't quite as characterful as the LSO's, and the trumpet in the Spanish Dance is rather queasy – so this one's not quite in *The Nutcracker's* top echelons.

SOME LONDON NUTCRACKERS

One of the earliest recordings of *The Nutcracker* came in 1956 from the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under **Artur Rodziński** – a lively jaunt through the Kingdom of Sweets, but hardly competitive. The clock striking midnight sounds like Big Ben (well, it is currently available on the Westminster label!), and the close miking reveals some provincial playing from the RPO. In the Arabian Dance, the tambourine interjections are shaken rather than tapped with the thumbs (an oddity that strikes both Bolshoi versions too).

Sir **Charles Mackerras** conducts the LSO on a Telarc recording made in 1986 for a film version based on Pacific Northwest Ballet's Maurice Sendak production. As in his LSO *Sheherazade* made around the same time, orchestral detail is a little fuzzy, percussion recessed. The celesta is so veiled it sounds as if the Sugar Plum Fairy has flitted off into the next room.

I was disappointed by **André Previn's** LSO recording (1972). There are some fine moments: after a stolid opening, the *pas de deux* reaches an explosive climax, and Previn allows his harpist an extrovert cadenza at the start of the Waltz of the Flowers which is a real ear-opener. Although very well played, the piece is dutifully paced rather than shot through with drama and is



Gary Avis as Drosselmeyer in the Royal Ballet's Peter Wright production

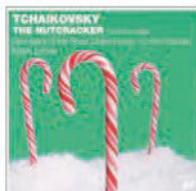
just a bit deliberate. **Vladimir Ashkenazy's** 1989 RPO account is similarly uninspiring – muscular and emphatic, lacking balletic style. There's vigour in the Trepak, but the playing lacks sparkle. **Richard Bonynge** recorded a lot of ballet for Decca, and his *Nutcracker* with the National Philharmonic Orchestra is suitably light on its feet (with some

THE BALLETOMANE'S CHOICE

Royal Opera Orchestra / Ermler

Sony ⑧ ② 88697 58124-2

If you prefer *The Nutcracker* to proceed at the sort of pace you'd hear in the theatre, then



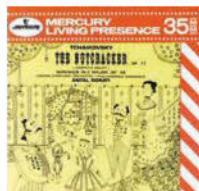
Bolshoi stalwart Mark Ermler's account with the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, is the one to buy, balancing grace with a frisson of excitement.

HISTORICAL CHOICE

London Symphony Orchestra / Dorati

Mercury ⑧ ② 432 750-2

Antal Dorati recorded the ballet three times, and his LSO version – recorded in 1962 on



Mercury – zings along at hectic tempos. Dorati sets the drama alight in a vivid battle while the strings swoon in Tchaikovsky's epic *pas de deux*.

harp-tastic Snowflakes) and is pretty but with little substance.

SPECIALIST BALLET CONDUCTORS

My first complete *Nutcracker* on LP was from **John Lanchbery** and the Philharmonia Orchestra (1982), in a shiny red box-set embossed with silver lettering and a sketch of dancers performing the *pas de deux*. Lanchbery was an old hand in the pit – he conducted the Royal Ballet nearly a thousand times between 1955 and 2001 (although there were only 14 performances of *The Nutcracker* during that period). His reading charms – nothing is forced, nothing is rushed. This is an account that could be danced to, from perky March to dainty Sugar Plum Fairy. The Philharmonia strings yearn in the great journey into the Pine Forest and even another adult chorus – the Ambrosian Singers – doesn't prevent the Snowflakes from flurrying attractively. Lanchbery includes a novelty item: his completion of an English gigue left among Tchaikovsky's sketches.

The Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, could play *The Nutcracker* in its sleep – there are some conductors under whom it arguably does – but **Mark Ermler's** reading (1989) is incredibly persuasive, despite a slightly

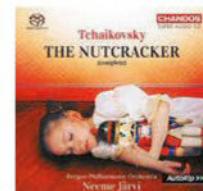
reverberant, hazy recording. From the bustling Miniature Overture, you experience the sense of anticipation that you would feel before curtain-up in the opera house. Ermler, a Bolshoi stalwart then principal guest conductor at the Royal Ballet, is alert to the dramatic moments in Act 1 – the mice scurry menacingly and there's sinister darkness to the

A NORWEGIAN NUTCRACKER

Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra / N Järvi

Chandos ⑧ ② CHSA5144

Neeme Järvi has recorded all of Tchaikovsky's ballets with this orchestra. Although this one



is quick, it never seems unduly hurried. The rich Chandos recording enhances the sweet Bergen strings while there is plenty of vigour to the divertissement.



Pletnev draws a 'toytown' feel from his Russian National Orchestra (p135)



Dorati's 1962 Nutcracker with the LSO 'zings along at hectic tempos'

transformation of the Christmas tree. The journey into the Pine Forest is unrushed and has immense grandeur. The *pas de deux* surges and swells ardently, timpani thundering. Here is an orchestra that really has Tchaikovsky's music coursing through its veins.

The RPO's finest *Nutcracker* comes on its own label under ballet specialist **David Maninov**, recorded in 1995, shortly before his death. The playing bristles with energy and style, light on its feet yet Maninov indulges in some knowing rubatos. Few performances of the Spanish Dance go with such swagger (with precise castanets), and his Waltz of the Flowers has a lovely sense of sway. The string playing isn't as plush as that of some superstar orchestras, and the timpani are quite muffled, but this is a very enjoyable account.

Ernest Ansermet was a tremendous ballet conductor, be it Tchaikovsky, Ravel or Stravinsky. His 1958 Decca recording with the Suisse Romande Orchestra betrays its age with some thin string tone, tinny percussion and a vinegary oboe, but there's a good deal of panache too, the Mirlitons fluting daintily. Ansermet prizes elegance over vitality, but there's plenty here to charm the ear.

ACROSS THE ATLANTIC

Leonard Slatkin's St Louis Symphony Orchestra offers a lively 1985 reading, buoyant in rhythm. The children's galop trips along merrily and Clara and her nutcracker dash into the Pine Forest. The Divertissement is played with gusto, including a brash trumpet in the Spanish Dance, but the *pas de deux* lacks heart. **Seiji Ozawa** is better in Boston (1990), enjoying splendid playing, with the woodwind well articulated. Sometimes he rushes climaxes (the Christmas tree shoots up at an alarming

rate), but the Boston strings sound glorious in the *pas de deux*.

Charles Dutoit's 1992 Montreal Symphony Orchestra account has all the delicacy you'd expect from this powerhouse of French orchestral recordings in the 1980s, wearing a gauzy veil that shields any brashness from entering. Dutoit is very much in Ansermet's mould – bringing an account in which elegance and refinement outweigh danger and darkness.

RUSSIAN NUTCRACKERS

Alexander Vedernikov was music director of the Bolshoi for eight years and knows his way around Tchaikovsky's ballets. His 2006 *Nutcracker* is in the Ermler tradition, steady in tempo (the sort of speeds to accommodate

dancing); but he only really comes to life in the big set pieces such as the transformation of the tree, which features some bruising brass. His Trepak is heavy and the Spanish Dance features massed castanets (possibly a Bolshoi quirk, as Gennady Rozhdestvensky, on a 1961 Melodiya recording, does the same; 1/62). Although excellently recorded by Pentatone, Act 1 is just a little dull and features the sort of Christmas party you'd try to leave early.

Valery Gergiev has recorded the ballet twice, both speedy traversals as expected from this whistle-stop maestro. The first (on Philips in 1998, when the Mariinsky was still labelled the Kirov) squeezes on to a single disc. Some will find the results garbled, but for me Gergiev propels the

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

RECORDING DATE / ARTISTS

1953	Minneapolis SO / Dorati
1956	RPO / Rodziński
1958	Suisse Romande Orch / Ansermet
1962	LSO / Dorati
1972	LSO / Previn
1974	Nat PO / Bonyngé
1975	Concertgebouw Orch / Dorati
1982	Philh Orch / Lanchbery
1985	St Louis SO / Slatkin
1986	BPO / Bychkov
1986	LSO / Mackerras
1989	RPO / Ashkenazy
1989	Royal Op Orch / Ermel
1990	Boston SO / Ozawa
1992	Montreal SO / Dutoit
1995	RPO / Maninov
1998	Kirov Orch / Gergiev
2006	Bolshoi Th Orch / Vedernikov
2009	BPO / Rattle
2011	Russian Nat Orch / Pletnev
2013	Bergen PO / N Järvi
2015	Mariinsky Orch / Gergiev
2015	Gürzenich Orch, Cologne / Kitaenko

RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)

Opus Kura	OPK7070	(2/55 ^r , 4/14)
Westminster	W 471 228-2GWM2	
Decca Eloquence	ELQ480 0557	(4/59 ^r , 9/09)
Mercury	432 750-2	(8/63 ^r , 9/92)
CfP/Warner	393233-2	(1/73, 2/10 ^r)
Decca	444 827-2DF2	(11/75 ^r)
Philips	462 747-2PM2	(1/77 ^r)
CfP/Warner	575759-2	(11/82 ^r)
RCA	88691 92008-2	(12/86 ^r)
Decca	478 6167DB	(9/87 ^r)
Telarc	CD80137	(5/87)
Decca	478 3106DF2	(4/92 ^r)
Sony	88697 58124-2	(2/10)
DG	459 478-2GTA2	(6/92 ^r)
London/Decca	440 477-2DH2	(3/94)
Orchid Classics	RPOSP006	
Philips	462 114-2PH	(1/99)
Pentatone	P 475 186 091	
EMI/Warner	631621-2	(12/10)
Ondine	ODE1180-2D	(1/12)
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Mariinsky	MARO593	(12/16)
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action on impulsively, giving drama to the Act 1 party scenes. The divertissement numbers sparkle – especially the glittering Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy – and there's a breathless excitement to the transformation of the Christmas tree.

As I noted in my 2016 review of his second, Mariinsky label recording (made in 2015), Gergiev is a man of the theatre and he makes the big moments tell just as strongly here as he did in his first reading. The *pas de deux* is sumptuous and the Nutcracker leads Clara through the snow in glorious splendour. Apart from a ridiculously fast Arabian Dance, a flying carpet ride liable to incur a speeding ticket, Gergiev's tempos are more relaxed second time round. However, his first account generates a touch more excitement and the Philips recording is brighter, particularly when it comes to Tchaikovsky's glittering percussion.

Mikhail Pletnev can be idiosyncratic in Tchaikovsky's symphonies, but his ballet recordings are winners. His Russian National Orchestra generates a toytown feel to the March and Battle, with children's drum (rather than a military snare) and tin-pot cannon pops. His bassoons are wonderfully grumpy providing the Chinese Dance ostinato, whereas the rest of the divertissement is joyous. Perhaps the two waltzes are a little po-faced, but Pletnev's account is one of the most enjoyable – and vividly recorded – in the catalogue, even if it doesn't quite make my final four.

FROM COLOGNE TO BERLIN VIA BERGEN

And now the one true dud. The Gürzenich Orchestra, Cologne, plays splendidly, but **Dmitri Kitaenko**'s tempos are torpid in the extreme. Most versions of *The Nutcracker* come in at around 85-90 minutes, while the speediest breast the 80-minute mark (Dorati/Minneapolis and Gergiev/Kirov each squeeze on to a single disc – both cut the repeat of the Grandfather Dance). Kitaenko drags out Tchaikovsky's score to 97 minutes, and while the character dances don't suffer too much, his waltzes are sluggish and the drama of Act 1 is killed stone dead. Kitaenko's *Nutcracker* (2015) is cast from lead.

Like Gergiev on Philips, **Neeme Järvi** (in a recording made in 2013) squeezes the two-act ballet on to a single Chandos disc (at 84' pushing the medium's limits). His Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra account, however, never feels unduly rushed. The woodwind chatter delightfully in the overture, and the March is brisk but sensitive to dynamics, the pizzicato strings skipping along to keep up. Järvi's party is lively, with whistles added to the frenetic interruptions of Fritz and his boisterous



'Man of the theatre': Valery Gergiev's Nutcracker with the Kirov provides 'breathless excitement'

friends, although the midnight chimes sound suspiciously like a doorbell! The character dances are splendidly characterised and Järvi negotiates a nimble waltz. This one's a real contender.

The Berlin Philharmonic has a pair of recordings up for consideration, from two very different conductors. **Semyon Bychkov** offers an affectionate reading. He loves Tchaikovsky's music dearly and it shows in every bar of their 1986 account, which glows and glimmers with warmth. The action sequences lack muscle and sinew, but highlights include a beautifully poised *pas de deux*, keeping histrionics in check, and a graceful Waltz of the Flowers, not as giddy as Dorati's but with a fine sense of flow.

If Bychkov loves Tchaikovsky, **Simon Rattle** was for decades less enamoured, professing in the plush booklet to his EMI recording that he 'wasn't always a huge Tchaikovsky fan'. Rattle's account of *The Nutcracker* (in a 2009 recording that represents his first Tchaikovsky on disc) is swifter than Bychkov's and the playing is very slick and polished, but I detect little actual affection for the music. The Waltz of the Flowers remains earthbound and his Arabian Dance is particularly stodgy, more akin to treacle than Turkish delight. However, Rattle revels in the excitement of Act 1 and the Libera choir in the Waltz of the Snowflakes is one of the best on disc.

THE VERDICT

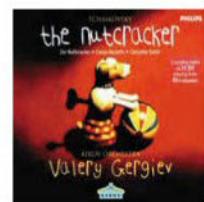
After nearly two months of eating, living and breathing *The Nutcracker*, I retain my sweet tooth. Tchaikovsky's magical score still enchants even in the dullest account. I have huge affection for Dorati's recordings along with that by Ansermet, but their ageing sound make it difficult to award one of them the top recommendation. Then there's the issue of tempos: do you want speeds that could be danced to or do you throw caution to the wind and get swept up in the drama? Ultimately, the excitement of the Kirov and Bergen versions holds sway. Järvi doesn't quite thrill in the way that Gergiev does in the big moments – Gergiev doesn't conduct an enormous amount of ballet at the Mariinsky, but his theatrical experience sees his first version breast the tape as my first choice. **G**

TOP CHOICE

Kirov Orchestra / Gergiev

Philips ⑧ ② 462 114-2PH

Valery Gergiev's 'man of the theatre' status sees his first recording of the piece thrilling



in the big moments while his breakneck speeds challenge Dorati, providing breathless excitement on a single disc. Tchaikovsky's score glitters.

PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

Presenting live concert and opera performances from around the world, and reviews of archived music-making available online to stream when you want, where you want

Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris & online

Piano virtuosics from Behzod Abduraimov, December 7

Uzbek pianist Behzod Abduraimov is one of the younger generation of rising stars. Grand prize winner of the 2009 London International Piano Competition, and 2010 winner of the Kissinger Sommer festival's international piano competition, he's been described as having 'fingers of fire', and he's certainly gone down the fireworks route for this recital in the Fondation Louis Vuitton's Toyoto-designed concert hall. On the menu is Busoni's arrangement of Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor, Liszt's Piano Sonata in B minor, Liszt's arrangement of Schubert's *Valse Caprice* No 6, Prokofiev's Sonata No 6 and Schubert's *Moment musical*, D720 No 2.

fondationlouisvuitton.fr/en, medici.tv

Metropolitan Opera, New York & cinemas worldwide

Richard Jones's production of Hansel and Gretel, December 9

When it comes to productions of Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*, for British audiences at least it's probably Patrice

Caurier and Moshe Leiser's colourful 2008 production for the Royal Opera House that springs to mind. As a result, this English-language holiday presentation from the Met should be particularly interesting to UK-based readers, because it's Richard Jones's equally colourful and exceptionally clever production. In this one, the opera's progression through the three acts from Hansel and Gretel's home, to the dark forest, to the Witch's gingerbread house, moves from the real, through the obscure, and into the unreal and fantastical. Food is the dramatic focus, which each act set in a different kind of kitchen, informed by a different theatrical style: a DH Lawrence-inspired setting in the first, a German Expressionist one in the second, and a Theatre of the Absurd mood in the third. Donald Runnicles conducts.

metopera.org

Philharmonie, Berlin & online

Maria João Pires plays Mozart with Blomstedt and the Berlin Philharmonic, December 9

You do have to pay for the Berlin Philharmonic's Digital Concert Hall live streams. However, given that Maria João Pires

recently announced that she will be retiring from touring and public performances over the course of the coming season, this concert feels like an opportunity worth flagging up, not least because it's Mozart's Piano Concerto No 23, repertoire she's famously wonderful in. Also on this programme, guest conducted by Herbert Blomstedt, is Bruckner's Third Symphony, performed here in its rarely-heard first pre-revisions version.

digitalconcerthall.com

Orchestra Hall, Detroit & online

Mahler's Ninth from the Detroit Symphony, December 10

Mahler's Ninth is perhaps not the lightest of offerings for the festive season, but it's good to have a bit of balance, and this concert - live streamed on the DSO's website - is the one we've picked to give that in these pages. However, we've also picked this concert because the Mahler isn't the only item on this programme from the Detroit Symphony and their Music Director Leonard Slatkin, because there's also the world premiere of a new work for orchestra, *Feuertrunken* or 'Drunk with Fire', by a composer not yet

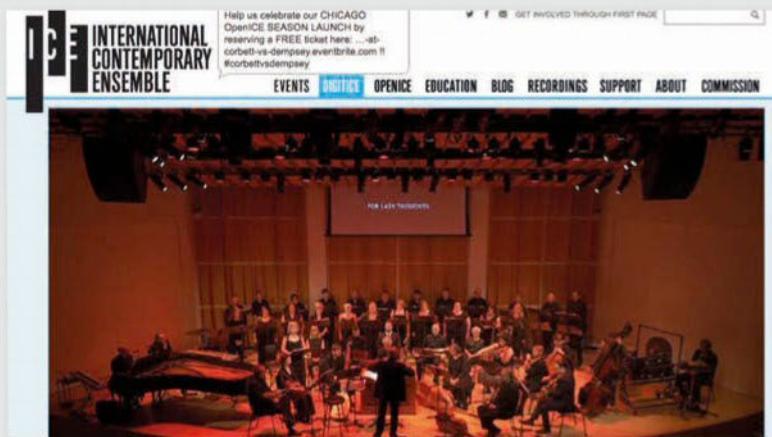
ONLINE CONCERT REVIEW

Among the riches of the ICE archive, the music of Anna Thorvaldsdottir catches Peter Quantrill's ear

Thorvaldsdottir

The International Contemporary Ensemble has been offering a varied diet of new music to listeners in New York and Chicago since 2001. Digitice makes freely available concert performances from the last decade, straightforwardly indexed and presented on the Vimeo platform. With simple, sensitive and unobtrusive camerawork and no applause or ancillary editorial material, the music is left for you to make of it what you will.

Cage, Oliveros and Wolff feature heavily, as you'd expect, but the filmed repertoire of ICE ranges across continents. Iceland lies on the overlap of tectonic plates between America and Europe; so, aesthetically speaking, does the music of



Anna Thorvaldsdottir, born in Iceland in 1977, long resident in the US and well represented here.

For those who hear in pictures, lava flows, piercing winds and Northern Lights can all be latched on to readily enough. I'm more interested in her individual ear for the timbral potential of unconventional instrumentation such as the percussion

and paired horns and trombones of *Into – Second Self*. Quite different from each other, Oliveros, Nono and Scelsi have yet all made impressions on Thorvaldsdottir. I like the layered, rock-strata dissonances of low winds in a quartet, *Sequences*; the more spacious harmonies of *Aequilibria*, grounded all the while by her trademark pedal-points; the refined severity of

gesture in *Ad genua*, a companion-piece to the *Membra Jesu Nostri* of Buxtehude; and the multimedia adventure of *In the Light of Air*. ICE has recorded this four-movement instrumental cycle for Sono Luminis, but the notes by themselves tell only a fraction of the story. **Peter Quantrill**

Available to listen to for free at digitice.org/digitice

Opera North's acclaimed production of Wagner's Ring is now available for streaming on OperaVision's new site

Wagner

Already seen live on tour, Opera North's (complete) *Ring* cycle can be viewed in the BBC's filming for the next few months. Praise has been (rightly) loud for the achievement and interpretation of their first-ever *Ring* by the company's orchestra – a full complement with massed harps, anvils and the iconic Wagner tubas – under its then-Music Director Richard Farnes. It's real opera-orchestra playing, audibly keen to enjoy the solo opportunities presented to them and clearly listening to the singers.

But praise has been perhaps not loud enough for the 'onlie begetter' work of director/designer Peter Mumford. In his ingenious stylized use of a concert platform setting, the singers and a handful of chairs occupy the forestage in front of the fully visible orchestra, the whole backed by three large screens for video of natural effects (water, fire) and projected text narrations from Michael Birkett's *The Story of the Ring* (their rather Victorian summary of the libretto's epic stage settings and events acts as intriguing spur to the audience's imagination). The onstage performance of the cast, wearing essentially formal evening



dress, deliberately removes all props (no sword, ring or spear – they're mimed) and allows little naturalistic movement, but focuses – crucially and movingly – on the emotions of the characters.

Outstanding in a cast largely from the UK and the Baltic are those who have mastered the production's guideline of stillness, acting with just body and face – Jo Pohlheim's Alberich, the Wälsung twins Michael Weinius and Lee Bissett, the American Kelly Cae Hogan's most feminine Brünnhilde (terrific top notes), Fiona Kimm leading the Norns, Robert Hayward's

Walküre Wotan, Susan Bickley's Waltraute (what cynical looks she gives Brünnhilde). But the extra movements of Jeni Bern's comic Woodbird or Giselle Allen's intensely emotional Gutrune make their mark too and both Siegfrieds (Lars Cleveman then Mati Turi) contribute untiringly. Addictive and informative viewing for all Wagnerian ages, tempting to watch in a short time span.

Mike Ashman

Available to view for free at operavision.eu, with various starting dates, until April 27, 2018 (Rheingold), May 17 (Walküre), June 8 (Siegfried) and June 21 (Götterdämmerung).

known on British shores, Joshua Cerdina. A young (b1989) Filipino composer based in New York, Cerdina studied with Michael Rouse at Juilliard, and previous commissioners include the Singapore Symphony Orchestra. *Feuertrunken*'s title is taken from Schiller's famous *Ode to Joy*, but it's Mahler the actual music references.

dso.org

La Monnaie, Paris & online

Poulenc's Dialogues des Carmélites, December 15

OperaVision is the newly repackaged version of Opera Platform, renamed after the European Union's Creative Europe programme renewed its support. So, that's free-to-view opera productions from 30 opera companies based across 18 different countries, and the offering we're bringing to your attention this month is a live stream of Olivier Py's brand new production for La Monnaie of Poulenc's *Dialogues des Carmélites*. Conducted by Alain Altinoglu, it comes with a fantastic cast. Blanche de la Force and the Chevalier de la Force are sung by Patricia Petibon and Stanislas de Barbeyrac (so a chance for you to hear this month's 'One to Watch' artist), while also on the bill are Véronique Gens, Sophie

Koch and Sandrine Piau.

operavision.eu

Bergen Philharmonic

Edward Gardner conducts Verdi's Otello, December 11, 13, 15

Edward Gardner's fine Bergen Philharmonic has been operating a Digital Concert Hall since 2015, and its offerings are free. Their December stream is a great one, Edward Gardner conducting a semi-staged version of Verdi's *Otello*, arranged in co-operation with the Bergen National Opera, with Stuart Skelton in the title-role, Lester Lynch as Iago and Latonia Moore as Desdemona. Check the website for the exact date of the streamed performance.

digalkonserthus.no

Nationaltheater Munich & online

New Production of Il trittico, December 23

Puccini's operatic triptych takes to the Bavarian State Opera stage here in a brand new production from one of the stars of the younger generation of directors, Lotte de Beer, who in 2015 won an International Opera Award for Best Newcomer. There are some fantastic names within the three operas' casts too, including Wolfgang Koch, Eva-Maria Westbroek, Yonghoon Lee, Pavol Breslik,

Ermonela Jaho, Michaela Schuster, Ambrogio Maestri and Rosa Feola. Kirill Petrenko conducts. This is one of the BSO's free-to-view live streams, viewed via the Staatsoper.tv section of their website.

staatsoper.de

Grand Théâtre, Geneva & live on Espace 2 (RTS)

Strauss's The Gypsy Baron, December 31

One for those who fancy some frothy Strauss waltzes, polkas, mazurkas and czardas as the soundtrack to their New Year's Eve, but in a slightly more thinking-outside-the-box form than a traditional gala concert presentation. Set in Hungary, *The Gypsy Baron* was an immensely popular operetta in Strauss's time, with its colourful characters, sparkling music including the *Treasure Waltz*, and its happy ending. It appears here in a new production by Christian Räth, with Stefan Blunier conducting the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, and a cast featuring a few names not usually seen on British or US shores including the tenor Jean-Pierre Furlan and the soprano Eleonore Marguerre. If you want to catch it in Geneva, it runs from December 15 to January 6.

geneveopera.ch/programmation/saison-17-18/le-baron-tzigane/ rts.ch/espace-2

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THIS MONTH The latest - and best - iteration of a classic speaker design, a simple amplifier with a winning sound and how to drive your hi-fi up the wall **Andrew Everard, Audio Editor**

There's life left in the CD in the streaming age

Japanese hi-fi giant Pioneer launches its new flagship SACD/CD player/DAC

Pioneer is returning to its roots with the launch of a new flagship SACD/CD player with DAC functionality ①, the £2000 PD-70AE. Building on the company's past successes in CD players, the new machine is described as 'a formidable distillation of all the expertise the brand has accumulated in perfecting disc playback'. It's constructed on the company's anti-vibration Rigid Under Base, and uses a shielded drive mechanism with a die-cast aluminium loader tray housed within a floating structure, along with digital-to-analogue conversion in the hands of dual ESS DAC chips. Coaxial and optical digital inputs are provided, along with RCA and XLR outputs, the analogue section being fully balanced, and the DAC offers a choice of three digital filter settings and adjustable digital lock range to reduce jitter. Custom components are used throughout the audio section, and the player has separate power supplies for the digital and analogue sections.

Moving back to non-physical media, Naim has implemented Roon Ready status in its latest Uniti products, the Atom, Nova and Star ②. This enables the all-in-one network systems to act as Roon endpoints, controlled by a computer or the Roon app

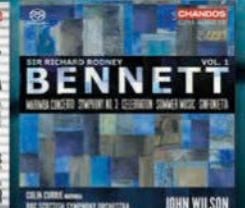
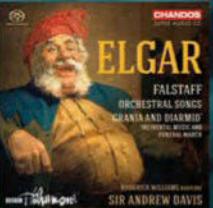


running on a tablet or phone, and brings to the range all the benefits of extended metadata, integration of network libraries and streaming services, upsampling and the highly intuitive Roon interface. The upgrade is available as a firmware upgrade for existing 'new Uniti' owners, and is installed as standard in new models.

Mission has a new range of loudspeaker models running from bookshelf designs to floorstanders, including dedicated centre and surround speakers, plus an active subwoofer ③. The eight-strong QX line-up starts with the £299/pr QX-1 standmount model and is topped out by the £999/pr QX-5, and all models feature an Advanced DiaDrive cone system, using a front inverted dome cone for smooth response, driven by secondary sub cone for improved transient response. Oversized magnets in the motor system further enhance dynamic ability, while the new 38mm tweeter is a ring dome design for better detail and lower

distortion. The speakers use a slot-loading port for bass tuning, and the QX-12 subwoofer (£189) combines a 30cm drive unit and 300W amplifier.

Astell & Kern has expanded its personal music player range with the £599 AK70MkII ④, which builds on the original model with a dual-DAC design, enhanced amplification, Wi-Fi connectivity, better battery life, expandable storage capacity and the ability to be used as a USB DAC as well as a portable player. Meanwhile, McIntosh Lab has got in on the mobile music movement with its new MHA50 Portable Decoding Amplifier (£895) – in other words a DAC/headphone amplifier ⑤. It provides inputs for Apple iOS devices and Android units compatible with On-The-Go USB technology, and supports computers via an asynchronous USB input. Bluetooth 4.1 with aptX is also provided, and the onboard DAC handles file formats up to 192kHz/32bit, DSD256 and DXD384. ⑥



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DECEMBER TEST DISCS



Linn Records continues to produce excellent recordings, and this suite of cello works performed by Corinne Morris with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra is a toothsome delight, especially in 192kHz/24 bit.



A truly luminous recording of works from the Peterhouse Partbooks - this is the fifth volume by Blue Heron, conducted by Scott Metcalfe - shines in the 44.1kHz/24-bit version downloaded from Qobuz.

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Wharfedale Diamond 11.1

The latest iteration of one of the classic small British speakers could just be the best yet

As loudspeakers go, the Wharfedale Diamond is one of the all-time classics: first launched in 1982, it's been in more or less continuous production since, albeit in a number of iterations - of which the Diamond 11 series, unveiled at the Munich High End show earlier this year, is the latest.

Well over a million pairs of Diamonds have been sold since that original model appeared 35 years ago, creating quite an impact with its relatively simple configuration - 19mm tweeter and 12cm polypropylene mid/bass unit in a ported cabinet of a little over five litres - and remarkable stereo imaging. Before the Diamond, the trend was for larger speakers severally described as 'bookshelf' or 'standmount' models, but the Wharfedales changed all that with speakers truly small enough to be used on shelves if you really wanted. The Diamond more or less set the trend for miniature British speakers, a formula followed by many a rival

Over the years, both the Diamond and the company behind it have seen changes:

the shape, finish and approach of the speaker have been altered many times; the single speaker has given way to complete Diamond ranges; and of course Wharfedale was acquired by the giant International Audio Group some years back, joining the likes of Audiolab, Castle, Luxman, Mission and Quad, and with the manufacture of the speakers transferred to the company's huge facility in Shenzhen, China.

The Diamond more or less set the trend for miniature British speakers, a formula followed by many a rival

This massive factory complex is one of the largest consumer electronics manufacturing plants in the world, and operates on a true 'raw materials in, finished products out' basis: all the parts for the products it makes, and even the tooling used to produce those components, are made in-house. It's what the business types call 'vertical integration', and it has clear cost benefits when making products on this scale for a worldwide market; however, the company still retains a facility, including R&D operations, here in England, although the company's Director of Acoustic Design, Peter Comeau, is based at the Shenzhen plant.

WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 11.1

Type Two-way standmount speaker

Price £270/pr

Drive units 25mm textile dome tweeter, 13cm woven Kevlar mid/bass

Sensitivity 87dB/W/m

Impedance '8 ohms compatible'

Frequency range 55Hz-20kHz

Finishes Black, white, walnut, rosewood

Dimensions (HxWxD) 31x19.4x28.5cm

wharfedale.co.uk



While the Diamond has indeed grown into complete ranges - the latest line-up runs to eight models, including dedicated centre speakers for multichannel set-ups - the 'sweet spot' has always been centred around the standmount models, which are closest to the original Diamond design. The 11.1 model we have here, selling for £270/pr, sits in the middle of the three-strong bookshelf speaker offering and stands 31cm tall, with an enclosure volume just over twice that of the first Diamond model.

Returning to the curved cabinet design of the Diamond 8 and 9, with its benefits in rigidity and the cancellation of standing waves enhanced by a multilayer construction, the new speaker looks elegant in a choice of black, white, walnut or rosewood finishes. It uses the 25mm textile dome tweeter found across the range and a 13cm woven Kevlar mid/

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**CD6006**

The CD6006 is the obvious partner for the PM6006/Diamond 11.1.



As well as playing discs very well indeed, it offers simple 'one remote' operation with the amplifier.

bass unit reflex loaded using a slot at the base of the cabinet, fed by a flared internal tube. Wharfedale calls this a 'slot-loaded distributed port' and says that the flares at the top and bottom of the tube smooth the flow of air, and that the whole design avoids port noise – or 'chuffing' – and also helps spread the effect of the bass reflex loading around the room.

The bass unit itself uses a new suspension of progressive effect for greater accuracy, while the redesigned tweeter has a ceramic magnet system with a copper cap for flux control. To the rear it vents to a specially shaped rear chamber, damped with a fibre filling, this taking the resonant frequency down below 800Hz, improving the integration with the mid/bass unit while allowing the tweeter to make a contribution to the mid-range, too.

PERFORMANCE

The latest Diamond has taken the traditional qualities of the range over the years – a lucid midband and excellent imaging – and added to them quite surprising bass for a speaker just over a foot tall. It's best when used on stands rather than on a bookshelf, with a little free space around it to let it breathe and a slight toe-in towards the listening position to firm up that imaging even more, but rapidly establishes itself as a remarkably insightful and involving speaker for both its size and its price.

Fed from a range of amplification, including a little British integrated amp and the more powerful NAD 388 (to be reviewed next month), as well as my usual Naim NAC52/NAP 250 combination and a Uniti Nova all-in-one, the Diamonds proved consistently entertaining, delivering a well-integrated sound as adept at all the hi-fi stuff of dynamics and detail, presence and poise as it is musically rewarding.

The review pair sounded a little restrained at the frequency extremes when first connected, with a slightly soft treble and the bass just a bit too tight, making them sound rather like typical small speakers, albeit ones with a rather impressive handling of voices and instrumental tones. However, a few days' running loosened things up a bit, allowing the upper frequencies to gain their breath

and the bass to add weight while still retaining its tight control and speed.

The best thing about the little Wharfedales – although there is an even smaller model, the Diamond 11.0 – is that they never seem to be working hard, even when delivering a truly room-filling sound with a big orchestral recording. True, they can't quite deliver the massive bass slam available from a much larger pair of floorstanding speakers, the specification giving their frequency range as 55Hz–20kHz; but what they do, they do very well indeed, never sounding in the slightest lightweight or undernourished. Instead, the sound is both integrated and attention-grabbing, and rewards extended listening with confidence and real insight.

The sound stage they create is both broad and deep, extending well beyond the speakers in both the horizontal and vertical planes, and with that slight toe-in – just enough to give a glimpse of the outer sides of the cabinets from the listening position – there's a realistic sense of three-dimensionality here too. It's especially effective with orchestral recordings, where the sense of the sections of the band stretching away from the listener is very realistic. Add to that the speed and precision of the speakers – and of course that sympathetic, detailed view of voices and solo instruments in the midband – and you have a pretty compelling listen, whether you use the Diamonds with price-comparable amplification or something altogether more ambitious. The speakers sounded very good when run with the little Denon PMA-30 Design Series integrated amplifier, thanks to reasonably easygoing electrical characteristics, but were also highly impressive on the end of my vintage Naim NAP 250 power amplifier, which is now well over 25 years old but was refettled back to sparkling form by the factory last year.

When the first Diamond speakers appeared, they created a sensation; and while the market has more than a few rivals these days, the latest Diamond 11.1 deserves to do very well indeed. The excellent quality of fit and finish completes the package here: the Wharfedales look anything but cheap and their sound lives up to their style.

Or you could try ...

The intensely competitive budget speaker market has long been a British phenomenon and has led to some striking bargains being developed in this sector.

Dali Spektor 2

The little Dali Spektor 2 speakers, at £200/pr, are, as the name suggests, a second-generation version of this compact design, now with larger drivers for more air-shifting ability and an increased internal volume for better bass. The soft-dome tweeter is revealing but sweet, while the wood-fibre mid/bass unit has an uneven surface to break up resonances for a cleaner, tighter sound. For more information see dali-speakers.com.

**Acoustic Energy AE100**

Acoustic Energy has been making excellent small speakers for many years, most famously its classic AE1 model: the AE100 is a simpler version of the same thinking, selling for £199/pr and with a 10cm mid/bass unit driven by a long-throw, high-power motor system plus a wide-dispersion 28mm tweeter, all housed in a substantial cabinet derived from that used for the company's more upmarket models. Radiused corners complete a sleek, modern look, and you can find out more at acoustic-energy.co.uk.

**Monitor Audio Bronze 1**

The Bronze range has long been the gateway to the AE100 range, using technologies trickled down from the company's more expensive models, and the £229/pr Bronze 1 speakers are no exception, with their large 14cm mid/bass unit and gold-coloured tweeter, both made from the company's C-CAM ceramic-coated alloy material for rigidity and lightness. Bolt-through driver mountings further improve cabinet rigidity, as you can read at monitoraudio.co.uk.



REVIEW EDWARDS AUDIO IA 1

The little amplifier that could

In a world where every product seems to be getting more complex, with digital this and network that, here's a simple, no-frills amplifier all about performance

The question is one to which I should be getting used, running as I do a vintage multi-box amplifier system. Visitors tend to look at the array of three enclosures – pre-amp/power supply/power amp – on the rack and, when I explain what they are, say, 'Yes, but what else do they do?'

Fortunately, it seems I'm not the only one who clings to the belief of doing one job, and doing it as well as possible. The little amplifier we have here is about as simple as you can get – inputs with a selector, volume control and outputs – and also has the relatively rare appeal these days of being handbuilt here in Britain by a company with an impressive track record not just in amplifiers but also in designing and building turntables. Edwards Audio is the latest iteration of

Good design can combine handbuilt craftsmanship and a fine product, and do so at a competitive price

the company started in the 1990s as Cable Talk, whose Talk range of cables was the go-to budget choice for many years thanks to no-nonsense construction and keen pricing, and which then became Talk Electronics when it branched out into amplifiers, CD players and the like. These days, although retaining the Talk name, it makes most of its products under the flag of founder and designer Kevin Edwards, including that growing range of turntables and the amplifier you see here, its entry-level model.

Yes, but handmade in the UK, and of a simple, performance-first design – that's going to be expensive, right? No – the Edwards Audio IA 1 amplifier sells for just under £400, which already makes it something of a bargain before you even fire it up. And while it is clearly simple as soon as you unbox it – there's not even a remote control in this basic version, let alone a phono stage for a turntable or pre-out sockets to allow it to feed an external power amp for biamping or simply for more oomph – these things can be added when you order, thanks to a modular design.

What we have here is a stereo amplifier, pure and simple: four line-ins on RCA phos and one on a 3.5mm stereo socket for the connection of portable devices, input and volume controls and one set of 4mm speaker output sockets for each channel. It delivers 50W per channel into 8 ohms, rising to 80W into 4 ohms and – well, that's about it.

Well, almost. Take a look under the lid and you'll see a custom-wound toroidal transformer with generous smoothing capacitors, relay input switching and a high-quality volume control, and a circuit layout that both uses high-quality surface mount components and on closer inspection is clearly hand-soldered. That's pretty amazing in a product at this price level but Edwards explains that, not only does he feel this delivers a better sound than the more common flow-soldering techniques, but that the design of the product has been streamlined to the point where the company can produce and test one of these amplifiers every hour, most of which time is taken up with that hand-soldering. OK, so that's not on the scale of those factories producing hundreds of products per hour, but it does explain how good design can combine handbuilt craftsmanship and a fine product, and do so at a competitive price.

PERFORMANCE

Set-up and installation of the IA 1 is simple: plug it in, connect up sources and speakers, and then flip the switch on the rear to power it on. The fascia lights up in red and you're good to go, with a certain nostalgia for the way amplifiers used to be. But there's nothing old-fashioned about the sound: whether fed from the budget Denon DCD-50 Design Series CD player I had to hand or around £14,000-worth of Naim NDS/555PS network player, the vivacious, involving yet beautifully controlled sound of the IA 1 was much in evidence.

Talking of control, it's good to see a volume adjustment designed for real-world use rather than maximum bang for the buck; here maximum volume is achieved at around the 3 o'clock position, giving plenty of subtlety of control over the usable range, whereas too many amps give everything



EDWARDS AUDIO IA 1

Type Integrated amplifier

Price £400

Inputs Five line (four on RCA phos, one on 3.5mm stereo), optional MM phono stage

Outputs One set of 4mm sockets for speakers, optional pre-out sockets

Remote control Optional

Power 50W into 8 ohms, 80W into 4 ohms

Dimensions (WxHxD) 21.8x8.75x32.5cm

talkelectronics.com

at 12 o'clock and nothing but increasing distortion beyond that point.

Playing into my usual PMC OB1 and Neat Iota Alpha speakers, this 'little amplifier that could' sounded anything but small, delivering a beautifully ripe brass sound in Walton's *Spitfire Prelude and Fugue* (ASMF/Marriner on Chandos) and lovely focus and attack on the skittering strings. Similarly with Richard Rodney Bennett's opening waltz for *Murder on the Orient Express* (I was having a bit of a film music session!). The low, menacing strings were definitely tinglesome, and the great moment when the orchestra (the BBC Philharmonic under Rumon Gamba) and the locomotive come alive and the music swings into the waltz itself even more so.

This is an amplifier with an unencumbered, unfettered view of voices and instruments, with a captivating immediacy to baritone Florian Boesch's recent set of Schumann and Mahler Lieder (Linn, 11/17). The focus of the music delivered from the Naim into the IA 1 is remarkable, with the voice and piano accompaniment conveyed naturally and with excellent depth and imaging, something this compact amplifier even delivers with big orchestral works such as Mendelssohn's Second Symphony, in the gloriously rich recording under Sir John Eliot Gardiner (LSO Live, 10/17).

Although I have been aware of the various iterations of this brand since its early days as a cable company, it's hard not to view the IA 1 amplifier as something of a find, albeit one that's been around for a while. Sometimes, it seems, simple pleasures have much to offer. **G**



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● ESSAY

How to drive your speakers up the wall

In-wall and on-wall speakers are nothing new but one innovative system is taking a whole new look at making 'invisible sound' a design feature

Wardrobes, tombstones and monkey-coffins – just some of the derogatory terms used in some quarters to describe the audiophile affliction that is a large pair of speakers taking pride of place in the room. Pride of place? Well, for those who like to revel in their hi-fi, an impressive pair of speakers is not just the best choice for optimum sound but also an integral part of the listening-room landscape. Go to any hi-fi show and what gets the gasps and whistles from newcomers to any demonstration room won't be that brand-new CD player or network audio device but the eye-catching pair of massive speakers, be it organically shaped, industrial and menacing or simply huge.

However, not everyone wants a giant pair of speakers in the room, so solutions are sought. You could go for a pair of miniature monitors underpinned by a hidden subwoofer, but then you'd still have the problem of having speakers on stands on display. Or you could opt for installed speakers in the walls or ceilings, although the average British home, with its solid walls, can provide serious challenges for the installer of such speakers, short of building space-grabbing internal partitions to house them. It's so much easier in countries where the stud and plasterboard wall is more common. The other problem with such installations is that in the walls may not be the ideal position for speakers in acoustic terms, although various wide-dispersion strategies are adopted in such designs to counter this limitation. However, one company is thinking out of the box in every sense, by not just designing a radical solution for the speaker/room problem but also making its new concept a design feature rather than trying to hide it.

When I visited Bang & Olufsen HQ a couple of months back to experience the new BeoLab 50 speakers, company *Tonmeister* Geoff Martin took the opportunity to introduce me to the team behind the company's BeoSound Shape speaker system, which tackles several problems in one go, not least of which is the way the stereo imaging from



Wall of sound: B&O's BeoSound Shape speakers

conventional speakers collapses when you sit, or wander, off the ideal listening axis. To address this, BeoSound Shape uses multiple speakers, linked together and programmed with digital signal processing that 'knows' where each speaker is, and what it should be playing in order to deliver a coherent stereo image for listeners at any position in front of the array.

Go to any hi-fi show and what gets the gasps and whistles will be the eye-catching pair of massive speakers

As the company puts it, the system uses a proprietary upmixing algorithm 'designed so you get the best possible bass performance across the speakers and distribution of the left and right signal to the various speaker tiles in the system, while maintaining one fixed sound stage with the vocal performer in the centre and the instruments to the sides. We call this the "band-on-the-wall" or constant sound stage.'

You could start with a small number of the speakers and expand, or put together a massive array covering a whole wall, as was the case with the demonstration I was given, with the sculptural design of the hexagonal speakers and the choice of shades available for the grilles turning the system into what looks like an art installation. And that's down to the industrial designer of the system, Øivind Alexander Slaatto, who was also responsible for the company's 'disc on a tripod' BeoPlay A9 music system.

Actually, there's more to it than just speakers, signal for which is conveyed between the interlocking modules – each around 36x32cm – using cleverly hidden connections. Concealed within the identical-looking array of units are speaker tiles, each with a 19mm tweeter and 13.5cm mid/bass unit, amplifier tiles containing eight 80W amplifiers apiece, and damper tiles. The last of these further control the dispersion of the system or, with their damping material removed, conceal power supplies or connections. There's also a source component, designed to connect to the master amplifier via an optical digital link and concealable inside a damper tile: this is the BeoSound Core, and it has both Bluetooth and Wi-Fi streaming, along with Ethernet, analogue line-in and B&O's own PowerLink technology. It is designed to support up to 11 amplifier tiles, each driving four speaker tiles with separate amplifier channels for treble and mid/bass units. The damper tiles allow the installation to be scaled up to any size.

The Core supports MP3, WMA, AAC, ALAC, FLAC, WAV and AIFF at up to 192kHz/24 bit where the format allows it, and has Chromecast Built-in, Apple AirPlay and Spotify Connect in addition to the Bluetooth and DLNA streaming already mentioned. Control is via the BeoRemote One, the BeoSound Essence Remote or the company's own app on a phone or tablet. It works extremely well, as I discovered while listening in Struer, where I was convinced it would be intriguing if it ever became real.

Except it is real. You can walk into your local B&O retailer and buy it now, or go to bang-olufsen.com and access an online configurator. And you can let your artistic streak run wild with the huge range of fabric covers available for the system: black, Brazilian clay, Infantry green, Parisian Night blue, Purple Heart and Wild Dove grey standard grilles, plus brown, moss green, pink and dark blue wool fabric from Danish design textiles company Kvadrat. It's all very striking, very clever and very enticing. This could just be the future of sound – not only *in* the home but also as part of it. **6**

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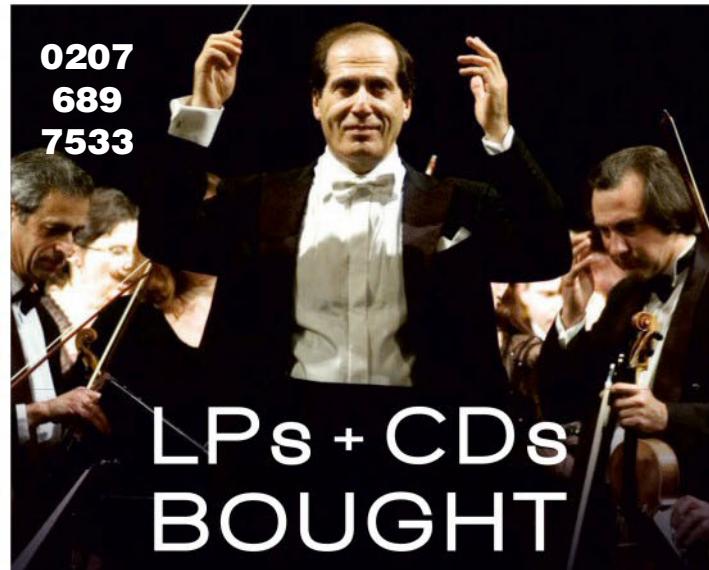
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Impractical Cats

Despite Tim Ashley's deservedly positive review of the Alexander Armstrong/Warner Classics disc of three works for narrator and orchestra (November, page 46), I cannot share his even partial enthusiasm for Rawsthorne's *Practical Cats*. Over the years, I have narrated every work written in this genre except *Tubby the Tuba* and, as the only person (so I am told) to have performed the work live since Robert Donat, I can state unequivocally that it is by a wide margin the most technically difficult and musically ungrateful work of its type. In my opinion it should be banned for cruelty to narrators, audience and the work of TS Eliot.

*Jeremy Nicholas
Great Bardfield, Essex*

Walton in attendance

Concerning the debate in Classics Reconsidered (June, page 106, and Letters, Awards, page 157) about the attendance of Sir William Walton at the EMI recording of his *Belshazzar's Feast* in 1972, may I shed some light? As a young technician on the sessions, I can confirm that the eminent septuagenerian, quietly observing proceedings, was indeed the subject of my equally young colleague's nudge and whispered query of, 'Who's that old git over there?'

*John Aldred
Hereford*

The broadest of minds

Who says we classical music buffs are blinkered and narrow-minded? A CD that couples 'My Favourite Things' from *The Sound of Music* with extracts from Wagner's *Die Walküre* ('Rarities of Piano Music 2016') and one that unites Gershwin's 'Embraceable You' with Berio's *Sequenza III* ('Crazy Girl Crazy'), both discs reviewed in the October issue, emphatically prove otherwise.

Barry Borman, via email

Dynamic range

Forty years ago this March, I was invited to escape work for a couple of hours and make my way across Lincoln's Inn in London to attend a Decca recording session at Kingsway Hall where Walter Weller was conducting the LPO

Letter of the Month



Maximilian Steinberg, standing, in 1908 with, from left: composer Igor Stravinsky, his father-in-law Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, his wife Nadezhda Rimsky-Korsakov Steinberg and Yekaterina Stravinsky

In defence of Maximilian Steinberg

Unlike Mark Pullinger in his review (September, page 57), I find Maximilian Steinberg's Fourth Symphony, *Turksib*, from 1933 to be both highly memorable and, in places, moving. Since buying the CD from Dutton I have played it many times and the tunes stay with me. I feel that he deserves more than just to be remembered as the teacher of Shostakovich and the son-in-law of Rimsky-Korsakov. I suspect that, in its use of the orchestral piano, Shostakovich's First Symphony shows

the influence of the redemptive 'tolling-bell' conclusion of Steinberg's powerful Second Symphony (1909).

The beautiful slow movement of Steinberg's Fourth Symphony also reminded me of the equally undervalued Danish composer, Rudolph Simonsen, whose moving Symphony No 2, *Hellas*, on CPO won a bronze medal in the arts competition at the 1928 Olympic Games.

*Jeffrey Davis
Rotherfield, East Sussex*

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in a Prokofiev symphony cycle. The work being recorded, while I was there, was actually Prokofiev's *Scythian Suite* ('Ala and Lolly') which at the time I had not heard. I recall that the huge orchestra was laid out like a long parabola, with masses of percussion at the apex and the brass arrayed in front and either side and more or less surrounding the wind and strings. From the devastating, indeed, shocking, first section, 'The Adoration of Veles and Ala', the sounds were beyond imagination in that wonderful acoustic;

at one end of the spectrum enormous, clear, totally overwhelming, and at the other subterranean volcanic rumblings – there is nothing quite like the sound of a very large orchestra all playing, but very quietly. I awaited the recording – LP, of course – with much impatience. When it arrived, I was very disappointed by the extent to which the dynamic range and sheer mass of sound had been emasculated, for want of a better word. I entered into a lively and friendly correspondence with the

producer at Decca, whom I had met at the session and who sympathised, but who explained to me the limit of what could be put in a groove on an LP. The correspondence ended there, but not before I reminded him about the cutting-edge sounds they themselves had achieved with, for example, the anvil in Solti's *Das Rheingold* 20 years earlier.

Fast forward to a year or two ago when Brilliant Classics released, on CD, under licence from Universal, Weller's whole cycle of the Prokofiev symphonies (with both the LPO and LSO), including, yes, that *Scythian Suite* performance. I read about this in your magazine but only bought the box-set quite recently.

Needless to say, the recording of the *Scythian Suite* was magically transformed with a much wider dynamic range and that unique Kingsway Hall depth of sound. I confess that I have re-recorded it just to widen the dynamic range yet further but now it fully brings me back to a very exciting approximation of what I heard in March 1977. Indeed, it could have been made yesterday. *Plus ça change plus c'est la même chose!*

Laurie Watt
London W6

Hindemith's masterpieces

I have always enjoyed Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler* Symphony since I first heard it when it was recorded for Decca by Herbert Blomstedt and released in the early 1990s, but only recently have I gotten to know the complete opera, mainly through the Kubelík version on EMI with Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau in the lead role. The opera itself is even more impressive than the symphony. It is a wonder why it is not more often staged, or why at least there are no video recordings of it. I also recently viewed a video of Hindemith's earlier opera *Cardillac*, which, unfortunately, is the only staging of a Hindemith opera I have ever seen. (I highly recommend this BelAir Classiques *Cardillac* video, by the way.)

Given the context in which the opera *Mathis der Maler* was written, and that Hindemith himself wrote the libretto, the opera is fascinating in many ways, as it casts light not only on the Nazi era but also on the artist Hindemith's life (the opera is somewhat autobiographical), all the while telling an interesting story from the time of the German Reformation. Sometimes I agree that Hindemith may have been too prolific and that many of his works lack the care necessary to make them great. However, Hindemith still produced a number

of substantial works, and I think the opera *Mathis der Maler* is one of them, musically, vocally, philosophically and historically. His Requiem is another masterpiece that is neglected. I feel that some of his works are deserving of much more attention.

Jonathan Dash
Pennsylvania, USA

More transcriptions

I greatly enjoyed Jeremy Nicholas's Specialist's Guide on piano works transcribed for orchestra (October, page 112). However, I must put in a word for Raymond Leppard's orchestration of Schubert's *Grand Duo* (recorded by him for Koss) – much more idiomatic and less Brahmsian than Joachim's. I wish Faber Music would publish the score so that others could take it up. Other worthwhile Schubert orchestrations include those by Liszt of the *Wanderer-Fantaisie*, and by various composers of a range of Lieder – Abbado conducted some on DG (7/03). As for Albéniz's *Íberia*, Carlos Surinach orchestrated the seven numbers left by Arbós, so you can hear a complete orchestral *Íberia* conducted by Jesús López-Cobos on Telarc.

Stephen Barber
Carterton, Oxon

We review a new Erato disc of Schubert songs, orchestrated by various composers and sung by Stanislas de Barbeyrac and Wiebke Lehmkuhl, on page 103 – Ed.

Günter Wand in Chicago

In his fine review of Günter Wand's live recordings (Awards, page 114) Peter Quantrill wrote: 'I can trace no record of any subsequent [from 1989 onwards] American engagements.' I have in my collection performances of Bruckner's Fifth and Schubert's Ninth symphonies, both with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, from 1990 and 1991 respectively, that I recorded from Connecticut Public Radio. Thus Maestro Wand had been invited back to Chicago at least twice.

Bruno H Repp
North Haven, CT, USA

Peter Quantrill writes: I did check the online Chicago SO archive but all it turned up were some vague press releases. And Wand cancelled his last scheduled concerts with them, so all I had to go on was the Brahms First. I'm most intrigued by the idea of those broadcasts – I'd love to get my hands on them!

NEXT MONTH JANUARY 2018



Three maestros, one family

James Jolly meets an exceptional conducting dynasty – Paavo and Kristjan Järvi and their father Neeme, who recently celebrated his 80th birthday

Recording Lully

As he records the opera *Alceste*, Christophe Rousset talks to Richard Lawrence about Lully's creative genius

Andrea Chénier

Hugo Shirley devotes some serious listening time to Giordano's star-tenor vehicle and recommends his top recording

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Edmund de Waal

The ceramicist and author of the best-selling 'The Hare with Amber Eyes' on how music is a constant companion at his South London studio

I play music all the time. It's a very, very significant part of my life. It can be a sort of interrogative thing, where the music makes me think and helps me try and work out what I'm doing; so it's 'disturbing' music. Or it can be music that I'm so totally inside that it paces a whole day, a whole week, or even a whole month. If I find I have to make dozens of vessels where do you look? You look to music which has a pulse, some kind of intelligible rhythmic structure, and which has repetition as part of it because that's what making endless pots is about! You're trying to return every time to a new ball of clay, make another vessel that sort of relates to the one before, but is entirely new.

There are whole kinds of music that have accompanied me in the last 30 or 40 years, and it tends to be early and Baroque music and modern music. I love Schubert and Rossini, but there's no way I can make pots listening to Rossini. But I *can* listen by the hour to very early music ... and John Adams. I've also been having a bit of a Morton Feldman year – and that's partly a spatial thing because I'm doing some very long projects for some very large works and you need someone who just occupies a huge amount of your life. And Morton Feldman is perfect. (I love undertaking huge projects; I absolutely love it. And when I finish I just start all over again.)

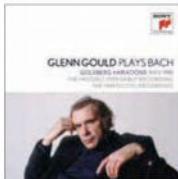
I did a conversation last year before an Aurora Orchestra concert which contained Richard Strauss's *Metamorphosen*. And they put Ligeti's *Métamorphoses nocturnes* into the programme, which I'd never heard – which sounds stupid for someone in their fifties – but I'm really perplexed and excited by his music. And since then – it was about nine months ago – Ligeti has been niggling away at me.

I'm very interested in memory, what you take from a previous generation and what you efface, what's erased. But also how people can return to previous idioms and ideas, and what can be reinvented, reinvigorated or re-created. Traditions are powerful and difficult things for everyone, but so far as the story-telling around traditions is concerned, that's about memories. It's also why I work with this material: when you pick up a piece of porcelain, there's no way that you're not also conscious of China, the Silk Road, imperial history, the 18th century ... yet here we are in South London simultaneously!

I'm about to make my first foray into stage design for a ballet using Leonard Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*. Of course, I knew the choreographer Wayne McGregor's work and had over the years seen quite a few of his ballets, including *Woolf's Works*. I knew the *Chichester Psalms* – I grew up in a clerical household in Canterbury and Lincoln – but also I'd been working on a very, very private project about the Psalms, too. I'd just come back from Jerusalem and I'd been



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I probably listen to Gould's *Goldbergs* every week – that remains absolutely constant. Sometimes I throw a curve and play his later, 1981 recording.

to the ghetto in Venice, both in connection with this Psalms project, and then this invitation arrived. What I've tried to do is create three spaces on the stage, almost like vitrines, for the music and the dancers to inhabit. So, I'm almost using people instead of pots!

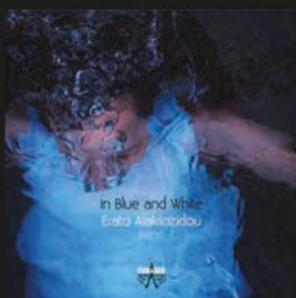
I'm working on something for the end of next year for an amazing modernist house in Los Angeles, the Schindler House, one of the great, radical 1920s buildings. That'll be a piece which will evolve over six months and move around, but that feels right because it was a house that was lived in by John Cage, and in the spirit of Cage you couldn't put something in a glass case and let it alone. It would go against every part of his experiential being. I love John Cage's extraordinary generosity, an openness to what can happen at the cusp of the visual arts and music. I love his ideas of what a score might be like; in fact quite a lot of my bigger works are bit like a John Cage score. I kind of love him, and sometimes I listen to him too. **G**

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